

ACTS

**An Explanation
with Notes and Quotes,
Illustrations and Applications**

G. Michael Cocoris

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PREFACE

The purpose of this commentary is to provide a practical explanation of Acts. The objective is a balanced exposition—explaining the passage in context and applying its truths to life with illustrations. Some commentaries are, by design, of a technical nature, delving into the meanings of words and phrases even outside their use in the book under consideration. Those commentaries tend to ignore the context of the book and its application. Other commentaries go to the other extreme and concentrate on the application, often not fully expounding the passage. Commentaries should do both. They should offer a contextual exposition of the book and apply the truths of that book to life. Adding illustrations facilitates clarity.

First and foremost, this is a contextual exposition. The context is not just the paragraph or the chapter but the whole book. In studying any book of the Bible, the first question that should be asked is: “What is the subject of this book?” Each natural literary unit, whether a paragraph or a narrative, develops a subject. A legitimate exposition will show how the author develops his subject. That, and only that, is contextual Bible study. All details in a book must be explained in light of the message and structure of the entire book. Words only have meaning in a context. A detailed explanation of words and phrases ripped from their sentence and the broader context is not exposition. The flow of the thought of the passage in the context of the book is the message the author intends to convey.

The Bible was written for living (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Even the most brilliant explanation that stops short of the applications is an abortion of what God intended. Thus, the practical ramifications of every passage must always be considered.

The procedure of study I use is to first divide the biblical book into its natural literary units (narratives or paragraphs). Then, I analyze each unit. The analysis includes an outline of the development of thought in that unit (major points and sub-points), an explanation of each sentence, and a summary statement. After I have personally analyzed each unit, I read commentaries, deliberately reading commentaries from different theological perspectives. I credit commentators’ comments by putting their names in parenthesis, even if I had seen that point in the text during my study before I read their comments. Thus, each chapter of this material expounds a natural literary unit of the book of Acts.

In the process of study, I also wrote a tentative title, introduction, and conclusion as if what I was working on was a sermon. If I stumble across an illustration, I include it, but, at this point, I do not search for illustrations. I write all of this for each literary unit in the book before preaching the first sermon in the book. As a result, when I begin speaking through the book, I have the whole book in mind.

As I prepare to preach each literary unit, I may change the tentative title, introduction, and/or conclusion. I rarely change the explanation of the text. It is as I preach each unit that I search for illustrations. Again, having studied the whole book first is helpful here. I sometimes found an illustration I knew would fit better later in the book.

The introduction of each chapter briefly relates that section to life and/or the context. The captions throughout the chapters are divisions of that portion of Scripture and correspond to the main points of a sermon. The italicized headings correspond to the sub-points of a sermon. Rather than footnotes, the author’s name is in parenthesis in the text. While applications are made throughout the exposition, the passage as a whole is summarized and applied at the end.

I wish to thank Kim Richards for proofreading this material.

May the Lord be pleased to use this approach to the Scripture to enlighten, encourage, and edify believers, thus glorifying His Son.

G. Michael Cocoris
Santa Monica, CA

INTRODUCTION

Acts has been called “the continuation of Luke (McGee), the “Fifth Gospel,” “a pivotal book of transitions” (Boa), “the only unfinished book in the Bible” (Lee), and “one of the most graphic pieces of writing in all literature” (Scroggie). Luke has been called “the greatest of all historians, ancient or modern” (Sir William Ramsey).

The title “Acts” comes from a word used in Greek literature to summarize the accomplishments of outstanding men.

Author

The author’s name is not mentioned, but the first verse refers to the former treatise sent to Theophilus. Luke wrote his Gospel to Theophilus. Therefore, he is the author of Acts. Internal evidence supports that conclusion. The writer’s interest in sickness and medical language suggests the author was a physician. Tradition ascribes the book to Luke.

Luke traveled with Paul (see the “we” sections, 16:10-17; 20:5-21:18; 27:1-28:16). As a close companion of Paul, Luke had access to the principal eyewitnesses of chapters 13-28. Perhaps, he also had the opportunity to interview key witnesses in Jerusalem, like Peter and John for the information in chapters 1-12. He may have also used written sources (Acts 15:23-29 and 23:26-30).

Some critics have leveled charges against Acts. For example, they charge Luke depended on Josephus for some of his material. Certain words that are common to the two are cited as proof. These, however, are mainly non-technical words of everyday use.

Recipients

Acts abruptly ends with Paul waiting for his trial in Rome, which means that Acts was completed before Paul’s trial. Since Luke recorded the death of James and Stephen, it would be strange if he cut off his narrative without telling the fate of the man whose story he had been narrating in some detail through more than half of his account. Failure to record the resolution of Paul’s case seems inexcusable except on the assumption that the book was written before the decision was reached. Furthermore, Acts gives nothing of the persecution under Nero, which occurred in AD 64, Paul’s death in AD 68, or the destruction of Jerusalem, which occurred in AD 70. So, since Paul came to Rome in AD 59 and had been there for two years when Acts closed, the book can confidently be dated AD 61.

Acts was written to Theophilus, a Gentile government official and a Christian, but it is not a personal letter. It is a formal treatise intended for publication.

Those who hold that Acts depends upon Josephus date the book late in the first century or even into the second century. Acts is not dependent on Josephus and such a late date is highly unlikely.

Message

The subject of Acts is the continuing work of Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit through several of the apostles, namely, Peter and Paul (see the “and” in 1:1; 10:19). It is the spread of Christianity under the direction of God from Jerusalem to the uttermost parts of the world through Peter and Paul. The message is Jesus continues to work by the Holy Spirit through men, especially Peter and Paul, from the Jews in Jerusalem to the Gentiles in Rome.

Structure

Acts 1:8 lays out the structure of the book geographically: Jerusalem (1-7), Judea/Samaria (8-12), and to the end of the earth (13-28). Acts 1-7 takes place in Jerusalem. Acts 8:1 says they were scattered abroad throughout Judea and Samaria. Beginning in chapter 13, Paul commences his missionary journeys to the regions beyond.

- I. The Lord’s Work by the Holy Spirit through the Apostles in Jerusalem 1:1-7:6
- II. The Lord’s Work by the Holy Spirit through the Apostles in Judea and Samaria 8:1-12:25
- III. The Lord’s Work by the Holy Spirit through the Apostles to the end of the earth 13:1-28:31

The content of the book indicates a biographical structure around the acts of Peter (1-12) and the acts of Paul (13-28). Another possible key to the structure of Acts is the summary statements that appear in the book (6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:31). There are other summary statements (2:47; 5:14; 11:21; 11:24), but the six that determine the divisions of the book are more elaborate and prominent (“the Word increased” in 6:7; 12:24; 19:20 and “churches” in 9:31; 16:5). Based on that analysis, Hodges divides Acts as follows:

1. The Church founded in Jerusalem 1:1-6:7
The Twelve witness to Israel.
2. The Church expanded from Jerusalem 6:8-9:31
Jewish hostility drives the Gospel away from Jerusalem (God begins to move out from Jerusalem).
3. The Climax of the Petrine Apostleship 9:32-12:24
The Lord opens the door for His Word to the Gentiles.
4. The Establishment of the Pauline Apostleship 12:25-16:5
Paul’s ministry to the Gentiles is fully Apostolic.
5. The Lord Jesus Glorified among the Gentiles 16:6-19:20
Paul’s ministry to the Gentiles is sovereignty directed by the Holy Spirit.
6. The Testimony of Christ carried to Rome 19:21-28:31
Paul is God’s man, whether in Jerusalem or Rome.

Purpose

One of the purposes of Acts is to chronicle the spread of the work inaugurated by Jesus, which He continued by the Holy Spirit through the apostles from Jerusalem to Rome. There was a need for an accurate and authoritative account of the activities of the leading figures like Peter

and Paul and even John and James. God witnessed through them “both with signs and wonders, with various miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will” (Heb. 2:4). Thus, the church was connected with the work of the risen and ascended Christ and authenticated. There was also the need to show that Christianity was one whether the believers were Jews, proselytes, Samaritans, Gentiles, or former followers of John the Baptist.

Another purpose of Acts is to defend Paul. Hodges says the purpose of Acts is to validate that the mission of Paul is the work of the risen Christ. Paul’s authority was vindicated as it was demonstrated that he did everything Peter did. His experiences and missionary labors, especially his arrest and imprisonment, must be seen in the right light. Was he a traitor to his people and an apostate from the Law, an impostor who deserved all the opposition and persecution that he received? Was he an insurrectionist or an instrument in the hand of God?

Summary: Luke wrote to Theophilus to inform him of the continuing work of Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit through the apostles from Jerusalem and the Jews to Rome and the Gentiles. God used Peter and Paul to spread the Gospel from Jerusalem to Rome.

God wants believers to bear witness to Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, beginning where they are and continuing from there to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8).

WHAT IS JESUS DOING NOW?

Having been gone all week to preach, I was greeted by a large pile of mail when I returned home. Most of it was junk mail. Of course, there were a few bills. The surprise was a book. I was not anticipating someone sending me a free book, but sure enough, there in a pile of mail was a complimentary copy of a book just published. To my delight, I discovered that the subject of the book was preaching and a fellow pastor wrote it (Fred R. Lybrand, *Preaching on Your Feet*). As I began to read the book, I came across the author's statement that preaching is a relationship between hearts: the heart of God, the heart of the preacher, and the hearts of the audience.

I trust you know that when I preach, I speak from my heart and my messages are designed to speak to your heart. Here, I would like to speak about the heart of God. What is Jesus doing now? He preached, taught, and worked miracles when He was on earth. In heaven, He is interceding for us, but what is He doing on earth? That is the subject of Acts.

The Prologue: Wait for the Holy Spirit

The Former Account “The former account I made, O Theophilus” (1:1a). Acts is addressed to Theophilus. All that is known about Theophilus is what is said here and in Luke 1:3. The name “Theophilus” means “lover of God.” Based on his name, all that can be said is that *his parents* wanted him to be a lover of God. Since the name is Greek, not Jewish, the “god” they had in mind is unclear. The designation “most excellent” (Lk. 1:3) indicated that he was real. It was an official title (Acts 23:26; 24:3; 26:25) of a high rank (*Ryrie Study Bible*), such as a governor of a Roman province (Geldenhuis on Luke).

Theophilus had been instructed in the Christian faith (Lk. 1:4). Although some have suggested that he was “an influential non-Christian (see Creed on Lk. 1:3), that is not the case. The Greek word “instructed” means “to teach by mouth, instruct, inform” and while it can be use of being instructed in any subject (18:25; 21:24; Rom. 2:18), in the context of Christian instruction it is used of believers (Gal. 6:6). Theophilus was a believer residing at Rome (Alexander), “a professed Christian of good standing” (Creed; see also Marshall). At the end of his commentary on Acts, Alexander says, “Although inscribed to one man,” from the beginning, Acts was meant “for the use of all men.”

Luke begins by reminding Theophilus of the “former account,” a reference to the Gospel of Luke, which is also addressed to Theophilus. The Gospel of Luke is “addressed to the same person, written in the same style, and exactly corresponds” to the description given here (Alexander). In the ancient world, it was common for a work to consist of several books and for the author to introduce each part (Marshall) briefly.

Bruce points out that the opening words of one of Josephus' works is remarkably similar to those of Luke's. Josephus dedicated *Against Apion* to a man named Epaphroditus. At the beginning of his first volume, Josephus addressed him as “the most Epaphroditus, most excellent of men” and he introduces the second volume with the words, “By means of the former volume, my most honored Epaphroditus, I have demonstrated our antiquity.”

The former account was to Theophilus, but it was about Jesus. In the Gospel of Luke, Luke wrote to Theophilus, “Of all that Jesus began both to do and teach” (1:1b). “until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the

apostles whom He had chosen” (1:2). The former account, the Gospel of Luke, contains all that Jesus began to do and teach until He ascended (“taken up”). Luke mentions “doing” before “teaching.” Jesus practiced *before* He preached.

Luke records what Jesus *began* to do and teach. Jesus wanted what He came to do to be continued (Alexander; Bruce). So, after He rose, through the Holy Spirit, He gave the apostles the Great Commission (Lk. 24:49). That means the book of Acts is the “sequel” or continuation of another book written by the same author and continuing the history of the personal ministry of Jesus. Thus, the former account is not so distinct a work as it is a “first installment” of the one that is continued in this book (Alexander). In other words, the book of Acts is “the rest of the story” (the famous expression of the author Paul Harvey).

Jesus is now working by the Holy Spirit (for a list of the works of the Holy Spirit in Acts, see Barclay, pp. 12-13). In a sermon on Matthew 28, S. Lewis Johnson said, “Our Lord continues to delegate His work to His servants, but He does not remain at headquarters, sending messages to the troops in the trenches (Acts 26:15-19). He continues His ministry through and in His men and women. In the fullest sense, the church is the body of Christ, in fact, the working body of Christ, not simply the mystical body.”

“To whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (1:3). The Gospel of Luke also contains appearances of Christ after His crucifixion. Luke calls these appearances during the forty days between His crucifixion and ascension “infallible proofs.” The Greek word translated “infallible proofs” comes from the Greek word for “mark, sign” and means “a sure sign, a positive proof.” Plato and Aristotle used it as the “strongest proof of which a subject is susceptible” (Alexander). The proofs were not only “many,” they were “infallible,” that is, “conclusive and convincing” (Alexander). They were incontestable (Rackham).

“The New Testament writers recorded at least 11 physical appearances of Christ between His emergence from the tomb and His ascension to Heaven. The details of each incident are significant. The Lord Jesus gave undeniable proof of His bodily resurrection by manifesting Himself in the following ways: 1) He allowed the company of women to touch Him when they met Him (Mt. 28:9). 2) At His first appearance to His disciples, He showed them His hands-and-feet and said, “Behold it is I Myself; handle Me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as you see Me have” (Luke 24:39): Then, as if to support what He had said, He ate a piece of broiled fish and a honeycomb in their presence. 3) Jesus convinced Thomas of His resurrection by encouraging him to touch the nail prints in His hands and the wound in His side (John 20:27). 4) He showed Himself to seven of the apostles at the Sea of Galilee and prepared a meal for them (John 21:12-13). Though they did not recognize Him at first, it wasn’t long until they became certain of His identity. The Scripture says, ‘None of the disciples dared ask Him, ‘Who art Thou? knowing that it was the Lord’” (*Our Daily Bread*, 4/19/1981). The fact that over 500 people saw Him at once dispels any idea that those who saw Him were suffering from hallucinations or that His resurrection as the figment of someone’s imagination.

During those forty days, Jesus also spoke of things pertaining to the kingdom of God. The expression “the kingdom of God” has been explained in various ways. Calvin says, “Regeneration is the beginning of this kingdom, and the end thereof is blessed immortality; the middle proceedings are in a more ample going forward and increase of regeneration.” Alexander says the kingdom of God is the church. In the Gospels, it was used for the Messianic kingdom and there is no reason for that not to be the meaning here (see comments on 1:6).

The Present Order “And being assembled together with *them*, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, “which” He said, “you have heard from Me” (1:4). The Greek word translated “commandments” in Acts 1:2 is different than the one translated “commanded” here. The one in verse 2 means “to command, enjoin, instruct,” while the one here means “to transmit a message, order, command.” This one means “charge,” especially the transmitted orders of a military commander (A-S). Jesus orders them not to depart from Jerusalem until they receive the promise of the Father.

The promise of the Father is the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (1:5). John the Baptist had announced that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit (Mt. 3:11; Mk. 1:8; Lk. 3:16; Jn. 1:33; Acts 11:16). They had heard about this promise of the Father from Jesus in the upper room (Jn. 14:16-18; 14:26; 15:26-27; 16 7-15; Rackham; Bruce). Notice all three members of the Trinity are involved in this promise.

“For John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now” (1:5). Jesus explains the reason (“for”) they are to wait in Jerusalem is because they are to be baptized with the Holy Spirit, which is to take place not many days from now. He contrasts the water baptism of John the Baptist with the spiritual baptism they will receive on the day of Pentecost (Lk. 3:16). The Greek word translated “with” in the phrase “baptized with the Holy Spirit” can mean “in, at, with, by, to” or “for.” Some take it to mean “in” (Alexander).

The Gospel of Luke tells what Jesus *began* to do and to teach; the book of Acts relates what He *continued* to do and to teach by the Spirit.

Jesus will continue His work, but the apostles had to wait. Part of what Jesus did when He was on the earth and part of what He is doing now is waiting. When He was here, He said repeatedly, “My time has not yet come” (Jn. 7:6, 8). He was waiting for the time appointed by the Father. Even now, God patiently waits. As Peter says, “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9).

The psalmist said, “When my father and my mother forsake me, then the LORD will take care of me. Teach me Your way, O LORD, and lead me in a smooth path because of my enemies. Do not deliver me to the will of my adversaries; for false witnesses have risen against me, and such as breathe out violence. I would have lost heart unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. Wait on the LORD; Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the LORD!” (Ps. 27:10-14).

“He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall, but those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint” (Isa. 40:29-31).

The Commission: Witness about Jesus

Their Question “Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, ‘Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’” (1:6). When they were reminded of the promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit, they concluded (“therefore”) that it meant that Jesus would restore the kingdom to Israel. They considered the Messianic kingdom “a glorious empire of Israel” (Rackham). They hoped to see the kingdom of God realized in restoring Israel’s national independence (Bruce). So, when they were gathered together and He appeared to them, that is the question they asked Him. Perhaps it was hearing Jesus speak about the gift of the

Spirit, “a sign of the new age,” that provoked them to ask about the restoration of Israel’s sovereignty (Bruce). We get hung up on 1) what concerns us today, 2) the extreme past, and 3) the extreme future. We need to know about the past (Gen. 1) and the future (Rev.), but we need to focus on what *Jesus* is doing in the present.

His Answer “And He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority’” (1:7). The Greek word translated “times” means “time,” and the word rendered “seasons” means “time, season,” in the sense of a fixed and definite period. Alexander says the difference between these two words is that one is generic and the other is specific. Jesus did not tell them they were mistaken about restoring the kingdom to Israel. In fact, His answer affirms that the kingdom will be restored. His message is that *when*, not *if*, that happens is the prerogative of the Father (Mk. 13:32).

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (1:8). It is not for them to know the time the Father will restore the kingdom, but, which in Greek is a word of strong contrast, in the meantime, they are to know about the promise of the Father (1:4). The contrast is between what they were not to know and what they were to know (Alexander). Calvin says that Jesus called them back to the promise of the Father “to bridle their curiosity.”

More specifically, two things should concern them. The first is that when the Holy Spirit will come upon them, they will receive power. The second thing that should concern them is that once they have the power of the Holy Spirit, they are to testify about Jesus Christ. Jesus is *continuing His work by the Spirit through witnesses*.

Although this verse is often used to urge all believers to witness (and all believers should witness), technically, this command is not given to all believers. It is directed to the apostles. Jesus gave *them* commandments through the Holy Spirit (1:2). He commanded them to remain in Jerusalem (1:4). He commanded *them* to be witnesses after they received the Holy Spirit, beginning in Jerusalem (1:8). Furthermore, they were witnesses *to the resurrection* (1:22). Throughout the book of Acts, Peter and Paul claim that they were witnesses of the resurrected Jesus. Some of this does not apply to us. We are not to wait or start witnessing in Jerusalem. We are not witnesses of the resurrection; we did not see the resurrected Christ.

The apostles were to accomplish the task of being witnesses to Jesus, which was a worldwide task. They were to begin in Jerusalem, which is where they will be when they receive the Holy Spirit’s power (1:4). The Greek word translated “and” in the expression “Jerusalem and all Judea” is not the normal word for “and.” It denotes a closer connection between two items than the usual word for “and.” They should not think Jerusalem is the beginning and end of their mission. They are to think of Jerusalem and its close connection to it—all of Judea, the area that contains Jerusalem. They were not just to be witnesses in the capital but throughout the country (Alexander). Once they have covered Judea, they are to go to the neighboring territory, Samaria, and not stop until they have reached the ends of the world. They were to go to the remotest nations (Alexander; Marshall).

In his *Ecclesiastical History*, Eusebius says, “The holy apostles and disciples of our Savior, being scattered over the whole world, Thomas according to tradition, received Parthia as his allotted region, Andrew received Scythia, and John, Asia, where after continuing for some time, he died at Ephesus. Peter appears to have preached through Pontus, Galatia, Bithynia, Cappadocia, and Asia to the Jews that were scattered abroad; who also, finally coming to Rome, was crucified with his head down, having requested of himself to suffer in such a way” (Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.*, 3.1). Paul, of course, went to Rome.

The church has grown like the Mississippi River. The Mississippi River begins as a small stream at Lake Itasca in Minnesota. At that point, it is only a few feet across. Even a child can step across it. Two thousand three hundred forty-eight (2348) miles later, in the New Orleans Delta, it is the mighty mile-wide Mississippi River. Wiersbe says, “The early church had none of the things that we think are so essential for success today—buildings, money, political influence, social status—and yet the church won multitudes to Christ and saw many churches established throughout the Roman world” (Wiersbe, comments on Acts 2).

This verse is often used as the outline of the book of Acts (Marshall; Wiersbe). Bruce calls it the “Index of Contents” for the book of Acts. Rackham says this verse contains the history of Acts.

The subject of Acts is the continuing work of Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit through several of the apostles, namely, Peter and Paul. In short, it is the Lord’s work by the Holy Spirit through the apostles. It is the spread of Christianity under the direction of God from Jerusalem to the uttermost parts of the world through Peter and Paul. There are two major ways to view the structure of Acts. One is geographical and the other is biographical. Geographically, Acts 1:8 spells out the structure of the book: Jerusalem (1-7), Judea/Samaria (8-12), the end of the earth (13-28). Acts 1-7 takes place in Jerusalem. Acts 8:1 says they were scattered abroad throughout Judea and Samaria. Beginning in chapter 13, Paul commences his missionary journeys to the regions beyond. There is also a deliberate structuring of the material around the acts of Peter (1-12) and the acts of Paul (13-28).

One of the purposes of Acts is to chronicle the spread of the work inaugurated by Jesus, which He continued by the Holy Spirit through the apostles from Jerusalem to Rome. Another purpose of Acts is to defend Paul. Paul’s authority was vindicated by demonstrating that he did everything Peter did. Hodges says the purpose of Acts is to validate that the mission of Paul is the work of the risen Christ.

We are to continue the work of spreading the gospel. Evangelism is not optional. Jesus did not say, “You may be witnesses.” Evangelism is not coercive. Jesus did not say, “You must.” They did not witness because they had to but because they could not help it (4:20; adopted from Richard C. Halverson, *Christianity Today*, 10/29/1966, p. 25).

Barclay says, “John Foster tells how an inquirer from Hinduism came to an Indian bishop. All unaided, he had read the New Testament. The story had fascinated him and Christ had laid his spell upon him. ‘Then he read on ... and felt he had entered into a new world. In the gospels, it was Jesus, his works, and his suffering. In the *Acts* ... what the disciples did and thought and taught had taken the place that Christ had occupied. The Church continued where Jesus had left off at his death. ‘Therefore,’ said this man to me, ‘I must belong to *the Church that carries on the life of Christ.*’ The book of *Acts* tells of the Church that carries on the life of Christ.”

His Ascension: Watch for Jesus’ Return

The Ascension “Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight” (1:9). Having given the command to be witnesses to the remotest parts of the world, Jesus ascended. He did not vanish or miraculously disappear (Alexander) but pass through the clouds. He returned to the glory which He had before the world was (Jn. 17:5) and assumed all the glories of deity of which He had emptied Himself at the incarnation (Rackham).

The Announcement “And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel” (1:10). The apostles were awe-struck. The Greek word translated “looked steadfastly” comes from a Greek word that means “strained, to look fixedly, gaze.” Alexander says it denotes tension or straining of the eyes. While they were fixated on the clouds, two men in white apparel stood by them. Men in white apparel is an expression used by Luke to describe angels (*cf.* Lk. 24:4 with 24:23 as well as Mt. 28:2; see also Mk. 16:5-7; Bruce).

Luke continues, “Who also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This *same* Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven’” (1:11). The angels announced that Jesus would return in the same manner as they saw Him ascend. He will come in the clouds (Mt. 24:30). They saw Him leave in power and glory and in power and glory, He will come back (Bruce). The promise of the Lord’s return is the background of the hope against which the disciples are to act as witnesses to Jesus (Marshall).

Jesus is continuing His work by the Spirit through witnesses until He returns.

Barclay says, “The essential teaching of Christianity is that God has a plan for man and the world. We are bound to believe that history is not a haphazard conglomeration of chance events going nowhere. We are bound to believe that there is some divine far-off event to which the whole creation moves and that Jesus Christ will be the Judge and Lord of all when that consummation comes. The Second Coming is not a matter for speculation and for illegitimate curiosity; it is a summons to make ourselves ready for that day when it comes.”

Summary: Jesus continues His work by the Holy Spirit through witnesses until He returns.

Someone has suggested that in Acts the Savior went up (chapter 1), the Spirit came down (chapter 2), and the saints go out (chapters 3-28).

Jesus came to seek the lost (Lk. 19:10). He continued that work through the apostles and after them through all who receive the Holy Spirit. The Great Commission has not been fulfilled or rescinded. It is in force until He returns (Mt. 28:20). This commission applies to us. The apostles are our examples.

We have the Holy Spirit and, therefore, the power of the Holy Spirit (*dunamis*, the Greek word for “power in Acts 1:8, is potential power; A-S, p. 153). We do not see it or feel it until it is ignited. The tank is filled with gas, but the power is not used until we start the car.

We are to witness. When we witness, the Holy Spirit works. He convicts the world (Jn. 16:8). Jesus did not give this commission to the outgoing or the gifted. He gave it to those who had the Holy Spirit. Jesus did not call you to be a prosecuting attorney; He summoned you to be a witness.

We are to start where we are. Jesus told Peter to witness in Jerusalem, the place of his biggest failure. He told the disciples to go to Samaria, the place where the Jews were hated. A pastor said, “I have moved off the program committee and joined the welcoming committee” (Wiersbe on 2 Pet., p. 89).

God is not looking for personalities, just ordinary people. God does not ask for exceptional people, He does His work through ordinary people. By the Holy Spirit’s indwelling, the most ordinary can become extraordinary. All God asks for is *you*; He will do the rest. He is not looking for special ability, only availability.

God “has waited for the ages for a person just like you. If you refuse Him, then God will lose His opportunity which He sought through you and He will never have another person on the earth just like you” (Cowman, p. 9).

Years ago, a man told of a lady in his church who was confined to her home because of illness. She prayed earnestly for an opportunity to be of service. Soon after that, the phone rang. Someone had called her number by mistake, but she took advantage of the opportunity and said, “No, friend, actually you have not gotten the wrong number.” She proceeded to witness to the person on the phone. She prayed for other opportunities and as she did, she got more opportunities to talk to people on the phone. Eventually, the word spread and she began receiving calls from people who wanted her to counsel them, pray for them, and even talk to them about the Lord (*Our Daily Bread*, 6/9/1960).

DETERMINING THE WILL OF GOD

Suppose I told you that a group of very spiritually-minded people determined the will of God by flipping a coin! You would probably think they had flipped their lid. Something similar happened in the New Testament, raising questions about determining God's will. How do you determine the will of God?

The Assembly

The Place "Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey" (1:12). The Lord ascended from the Mount of Olives (Lk. 24:50-51). After the ascension, the apostles returned to Jerusalem, a short distance away. Bruce explains that the Sabbath day's journey concept was based on two passages from the Old Testament. The first says that no one is to leave his place on the Sabbath. "See! For the LORD has given you the Sabbath; therefore, He gives you on the sixth-day bread for two days. Let every man remain in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day" (Ex. 16:29). The second was defining the pasture of the Levites as a radius of 2000 cubits from one of the six "cities of refuge." "And you shall measure outside the city on the east side two thousand cubits, on the south side two thousand cubits, on the west side two thousand cubits, and on the north side two thousand cubits. The city *shall be* in the middle. This shall belong to them as common-land for the cities" (Num. 35:5). Marshall says the Sabbath Day's journey was about three-quarters of a mile. Barclay says it was more than half a mile. Barclay is right. A cubit was 18 inches. Two thousand cubits is more than half a mile (2000 x 18 inches = 36,000 inches, which is 3000 feet and 1000 yards).

"And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying" (1:13a). This is probably a reference to the same upper room that was the site of the institution of the Lord's Supper (Alexander; Rackham) and possibly the one where Jesus appeared to the apostles on the day He rose (Zahn, cited by Bruce). It has been argued that the word "the" before the "upper room" indicates a special room (Zahn, cited by Bruce). An "attractive speculation" is that it was the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark (Bruce).

The People "Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James *the son* of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; and Judas *the son* of James" (1:13b). Eleven of the twelve were present on this occasion. Judas, of course, was not among them. Actually, there were 120 assembled in the upper room (1:15), including women and the immediate family of Jesus (1:14). The names of the apostles are given four times in the New Testament (Mt. 10:2-4; Mk. 3:16-19; Lk. 6:14-16; Acts 1:13). In each case, the list is divided into three parts with the leading name in each of the three always being the same. Peter is always mentioned first, Philip fifth, and James, Alphaeus's son, ninth. Peter being first does not designate him as superior in rank or office but as the spokesman, like the jury's foreman or the committee's chairman (Alexander).

The Prayer "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers" (1:14). The 120 were unified in prayer, waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit (1:4). The expression "with one accord" denotes

unanimity of sentiment and agreement (Alexander). It has been suggested that the women were the wives of those present (Calvin), but not all concur (Alexander). It has also been suggested that these women from Galilee had accompanied Jesus to Jerusalem (Lk. 8:2-3; Bruce). This the last mention of Mary in the New Testament.

The brothers were the half-brothers of Jesus, the sons of Joseph and Mary after the birth of Jesus (Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 4:19, *On the Flesh of Christ* 7). Epiphanius (4th century) argued they were the sons of Joseph by a former wife, but there is no evidence to support that (Epiphanius, *Panarion* 78). In reaction to Helvidus (380 AD), who's campaign against the prevailing teaching that celibacy was a superior way of life to matrimony, Jerome proposed a new view that the Lord's "brothers" were his first cousins, sons of Alphaeus by Mary of Clopas, whom he inferred from John 19:25 to be Mary's sister (Jerome, *Against Helvidus: On the Perpetual Virginity of the Blessed Mary*; see also "The Brethren of the Lord" in Lightfoot's commentary on Galatians and Mayor's commentary on James). During the ministry of Jesus, His brothers did not believe in Him (Jn. 7:5).

Someone has described them as huddled in defeat in the upper room. "The disciples who prayed in the upper room are like men huddled in a dark cabin on a stormy night without lights, because the transformer was out. They were waiting for one of their number, who was stumbling through the black night, in torrents of rain and the crackling lightning, to find his way to the powerhouse to repair the breakdown" (source unknown).

Did they pray but not believe in prayer? In a small mid-western, conservative town, a new tavern began construction on a building. With petitions and prayers, the local Baptist church started a campaign to block the bar from opening. Work progressed, however, until the week before opening, when a lightning strike hit the bar and burned to the ground. The church folks were rather smug in their outlook after that till the bar owner sued the church on the grounds that the church was ultimately responsible for the demise of his building, either through direct or indirect actions or means. The church vehemently denied all responsibility or connection to the building's demise in its reply to the court. As the case made its way into court, the judge looked over the paperwork at the hearing and commented, "I don't know how I'm going to decide this, but as it appears from the paperwork, we have a bar owner that believes in the power of prayer, and an entire church congregation that doesn't."

They were expecting something big (1:8). Hughes says they were in expectant belief and expectant prayer. Among those in the court of Alexander the Great was a philosopher of outstanding ability but little money. He asked Alexander for financial help and was told to draw whatever he needed from the imperial treasury. But when the man requested an amount equal to \$50,000, he was refused—the treasurer needed to verify that such a large sum was authorized. When he asked Alexander, the ruler replied, "Pay the money at once. The philosopher has done me a singular honor. By the largeness of his request, he shows that he has understood both my wealth and generosity" (*Today in the Word*, MBI, August 1991, p. 19). We should pray like that.

The Address

The Sermon "And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples (altogether the number of names was about a hundred and twenty), and said" (1:15). While they were waiting in Jerusalem as the Lord had commanded them, Peter made a speech to 120 of the Lord's faithful followers. He was seeking their cooperation concerning the replacement of Judas (Rackham). Peter was "first among equals, "but he was, nevertheless, the recognized leader; his name is

mentioned first in the lists of the apostles (Wiersbe). Interestingly, according to Jewish law, a minimum of 120 Jewish men were required to establish a community with its own counsel. Perhaps there is a subtle hint here that this body was of sufficient size to form a new community (Marshall).

“Men *and* brethren, this Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus” (1:16). Peter begins his speech by quoting two passages from the Psalm (see verse 20) saying that David wrote them. He applies these two passages to Judas, who is identified as the one who guided those who arrested Jesus.

For he was numbered with us and obtained a part in this ministry” (1:17). Peter reminds them that Judas was part and parcel of their ministry with Jesus. This is the reason why the prophecy about Judas concerns them, namely that Judas has personal participation with them (Alexander). The Twelve fulfilled the special function as apostles to the Jews, and they were the ones who would sit on the throne to judge the 12 tribes of Israel (Lk. 9:1-6; 22:28-30); replacing Judas was probably meant to indicate that the task of witnessing to the Jews that Jesus is the Messiah was to be continued after His resurrection (Marshall).

“(Now this man purchased a field with the wages of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his entrails gushed out” (1:18). At this point, Luke inserts a parenthetical thought to explain to his readers the background of Peter’s remarks (Bruce; Marshall). Luke says, “this man” purchased the field. Matthew says that it was the priest who purchased the field (Mt. 27:7). Alexander argues that this is not a contradiction because the word translated “purchase” means “acquired” or “gained.” It was Judas’ money. Therefore, even though the priest actually purchased it, it can be said to have been acquired by Judas because it was obtained with his money. This explanation fits the fact that Judas tossed the money at the feet of the priest. With the money he received for betraying Jesus, a burial plot was purchased for Judas.

Luke says that, falling headlong, Judas burst open in the middle, and all his entrails gushed out on the ground. Matthew says Judas hanged himself (Mt. 27:5). Apparently, Judas hung himself, the rope or branch broke, and when he fell, he was violently thrown to the ground so that his body ruptured and his inward parts poured out (Alexander).

“And it became known to all those dwelling in Jerusalem; so that field is called in their own language, Akel Dama, that is, Field of Blood.” (1:19). The inhabitants of Jerusalem call the burial place of Judas the Field of Blood. Their own language could be a dialect of Judea or Jerusalem, which is distinct from that of Galilee.

The Scripture “For it is written in the book of Psalms: ‘Let his dwelling place be desolate, and let no one live in it’; and, ‘Let another take his office’” (1:20). This verse is connected to verse 16. Peter quotes Psalm 69:25 and Psalm 109:8. Psalm 69:25 is a prayer for removing the psalmist’s enemies. Psalm 109:8 is a prayer for replacement (*NKJV Study Bible*; Bruce).

Do the Psalms prophesy the removal and replacement of Judas? Bruce points out that many of David’s experiences in the Psalms are understood prophetically and are applicable to Jesus (2:25-31; 34-35). Many of the afflictions endured by the righteous sufferer in the Psalms are also applied to the Messiah. Therefore, it follows that what is said of the Lord’s anointed or of the righteous are also interpreted of the enemies of Jesus (4:25-28). In John 13:18, Jesus quotes Psalm 41:9 in His announcements of the presence of a traitor. In John 17:12, Jesus prays, “none of them is except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.”

Marshall explains that Psalm 69:25 represents a threat against the enemies of a godly person, who was seen by Jesus as well as the early church as “typifying” the Messiah. Hence, it was natural to find in this Psalm “a prophecy or type” of the prayer of Jesus. Marshall says that in Psalm 109, the Psalmist wishes someone else would take the occupation of his enemy. Marshall also calls Psalm 69 an “application” to Judas and suggests that these Old Testament passages provided confirmation for the action taken rather than their original inspiration.

The Suggestion “Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection” (1:21-22). Peter concludes that someone should replace Judas and suggest that the qualification for the replacement be that the person must have been one who had traveled with the Lord throughout His entire public ministry (Alexander). The Greek word translated “men” indicates that the replacement is to be a male, not a female (Alexander). According to the Gospel of John, at least half of the Twelve began to follow Jesus immediately following His baptism by John (Jn. 1:35-51). With the other Apostle, this person is to serve as a witness of the resurrection.

The Alternatives

The Proposal “And they proposed two: Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias” (1:23). The group (1:16) concluded that Joseph and Matthias met the qualification set down by Peter. Since the Greek word translated “Barsabas” means “son of the Sabbath,” that name may have been given to Joseph because he was born on the Sabbath (Bruce). Justus was his Gentile name. Many of the Jews at that time had a Gentile as well as a Jewish name (Bruce). According to Eusebius, Papias reported that Philip’s daughters said this Joseph, challenged by unbelievers, drank venom in the Lord’s name and suffered no harm (Bruce). Also, according to Eusebius, Mathias was one of the seventy and later tradition indicates he was a missionary to the Ethiopians (Bruce).

If they were competent to choose two, why not one? If the decision is up to God, what right did they have to choose two? Alexander suggests these two were the only ones present who possessed the necessary qualifications.

The Prayer “And they prayed and said, ‘You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen to take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place’” (1:24-25). The group prayed that the Lord would indicate which one He had chosen (Rackham). The Lord is a reference to Jesus. Lord is uniformly used of Him in the New Testament and He is the One who chose the original twelve (Alexander, who also says see 1:2; also Marshall). The replacement would replace Judas, who felt he might go to his own place. His own place is, of course, the place of torment (Lk. 16:28; Alexander).

The Person “And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles” (1:26). To determine which of the two should replace Judas, they cast lots. The casting of lots was used in the Old Testament for the selection of a scapegoat (Lev. 16:8), the distribution of the duties of the sons of Aaron (1 Chron. 24:5-19), and the division of the land (Josh. 18:8). It determined the offices and duties in the Temple (Barclay). The exact method of casting lots is not known. Alexander says in the *Iliad*, lots were cast into a helmet. After shaking the helmet, the first one out was the answer. Barclay says the normal way of casting lots was that the names of the candidates were written on stones and the stones were put into a vessel. The

vessel was shaken until one of the stones fell out. The name on that stone was elected to the office.

Why did they cast lots? Proverbs 16:33 says, “The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision *is* from the LORD.” Matthias was reckoned an apostle by “divine right” (Alexander). He was not appointed by the apostles or the church but by the Lord; it was His doing (Rackham). The choice was left of the Lord because apostleship is not a humanly ordained office and the casting of lots used to allow the Lord to make the choice (Marshall).

Should Matthias have taken the place of Judas? The arguments against the replacement are: 1) There was no express command. 2) Peter was habitually rash and forward. 3) The Holy Spirit had not yet been given. 4) Nothing more is ever heard of Matthias. 5) Paul is excluded from the number of the twelve.

Those arguments are answered by: 1) A command is often inferred from its execution. 2) The whole group, not just Peter, was involved in the process. 3) The apostles received a temporary measure of the Holy Spirit before Pentecost (Jn. 20:22). What they had not received was the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. 4) History is also silent concerning all of the apostles except Peter and John. 5) Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles. Besides, after this, the eleven were called the twelve (see Alexander). Paul made it clear that he was not to be classified as one of the Twelve (Gal. 1:15-24; 1 Cor. 15:8) and the Twelve knew it (Wiersbe). Bruce says it would be “a complete mistake” to suggest that Paul filled the vacancy. He did not possess the qualifications set out in Acts 1:21-22 and he himself would have dismissed the idea as prosperous. Hodges says the suggestion that their choice of Matthias was a mistake is wholly without exegetical foundation (Hodges, unpublished class notes). Later, Luke refers to the inclusion of Matthias as one of the apostles (see “Twelve” in 6:1), which indicates that he was of the opinion that Matthias replaced Judas among the original band of apostles.

The replacement of Judas was due to his defection, not his death. This was a one-time issue, not a practice to be applied to after this. When James, the son of Zebedee, died some years later (12:1-2), he was not replaced (Bruce).

Summary: By the Holy Spirit, the Lord worked through prayer and the Scripture to direct the apostles to replace Judas.

What method should we use to determine the will of God? Should we cast lots to determine the will of God? Rackham points out that the casting of lots was in the spirit of the Old Testament and disappeared after Pentecost. Henceforth, the apostles were guided by the indwelling Holy Spirit, not external signs. Casting lots was never indicated to be a permanent, universal practice.

Should we depend on inner peace? Paul Little tells of a girl who had signed a contract to teach. In August, she received another offer from a school closer to where she wanted to live. So she broke the original contract. Had she acted on the biblical principle in Psalms 15:4, where God says that He is pleased with a person who swears to his own hurt and does not change, she would not have done that. The department chairman ... said her justification was “I have a peace about it,” and he commented rather sardonically, “Isn’t that lovely? She’s got the peace and I’ve got the pieces.” Little says, “I believe that girl missed the will of God. She violated a principle which, if she had been alert and had applied it to her situation, would have given her clear guidance in this specific detail of her life” (Little, *Christianity Today*, vol. 33, no. 16).

Besides the casting of lots, they 1) Looked at the Scripture. 2) Prayed. and 3) Agreed as a group. The Lord had opened their minds to understand the Scripture (Lk. 24:45) and the Lord

had breathed on them, imparting to them the Holy Spirit until Pentecost (Jn. 20:22), at which time they were baptized by the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5). Peter was not referring to the Psalms on his own; he was being guided into all truth of the Spirit of God (Wiersbe).

We need to think—biblically. Make sure that when you claim something is the will of God, you are quoting Scripture in context. It is possible to think something is the will of God when it is not. A bishop of a century ago pronounced from his pulpit and, in the periodical he edited, that heavier-than-air flight was both impossible and contrary to the will of God. That Bishop, named Wright, had two sons, Orville and Wilbur! Wright was wrong, sure of himself, but wrong.

“The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man’s salvation, faith and life is either expressly set down in Scripture or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture, unto which nothing at any time is to be added whether by new revelations of the Spirit or traditions of man” (Westminster Confession of Faith).

In his book *Your Father Loves You*, James Packer says, “If we want God to guide us, our attitude needs to be right. Here are some guidelines on how we can play our part in making the right decisions.

“First, we must be willing to think. It is false piety, super-supernaturalism of an unhealthy pernicious sort that demands inward impressions with no rational base and declines to heed the constant biblical summons to consider. God made us thinking beings, and he guides our minds as we think things out in his presence.

“Second, we must be willing to think ahead and weigh the long-term consequences of alternative courses of action. Often, we can only see what is wise and right and what is foolish and wrong as we dwell on the long-term issues.

“Third, we must be willing to take advice. It is a sign of conceit and immaturity to dispense without taking advice in major decisions. There are always people who know the Bible, human nature, and our own gifts and limitations better than we do, and even if we cannot finally accept their advice, nothing but good will come to us from carefully weighing what they say.

“Fourth, we must be willing to be ruthlessly honest with ourselves. We must suspect ourselves: ask ourselves why we feel a particular course of action will be right and make ourselves give reasons.

“Fifth, we must be willing to wait. ‘Wait on the Lord’ is a constant refrain in the Psalms and it is a necessary word, for the Lord often keeps us waiting. When in doubt, do nothing, but continue to wait on God” (Packer, p. 13).

BIBLICAL PENTECOST

When my brother and I were small, on several occasions, my mother hired a young lady to babysit us. I don't remember her name or much about her. However, she did two things that made a great impression on me. The first was when she was babysitting us on New Year's Eve. I remember that she brought in the new year on her knees. She wanted prayer to be the first thing she did in the new year. My second recollection of her is something that happened several years later. I ran into her shortly after I became a Christian. She was thrilled to know that I had come to know the Lord, but she wanted to know if I had received the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues.

At that point in my spiritual experience, I knew nothing about the baptism of the Holy Spirit or speaking in tongues. All I knew was that if there was something else the Lord could give me, I wanted it. So, I began to search the Scriptures to see what they said about the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Pentecostalism teaches 1) After conversion, believers need to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit. 2) The significance of the baptism of the Holy Spirit is to give believers power. 3) The evidence of the baptism the Holy Spirit is speaking in tongues, which many interpret to mean a heavenly language. That raises several questions: When does the Baptism of the Holy Spirit occur? What is the significance of the baptism of the Holy Spirit? What is the nature of speaking in tongues?

The Coming of the Holy Spirit

The Setting “When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place” (2:1). “The Greek word translated “Pentecost” means “fifty.” The Day of Pentecost is a reference to an Old Testament festival, which was 50 days after Passover (Barclay).

In Leviticus 23, Moses instructed Israel to observe seven yearly festivals. The first three were to be observed in the first month. Passover (Lev. 23:4-5) was to be observed on the fourteenth day of the first month (Abaib, subsequently called Nisan, corresponding to March/April). It commemorated the passing over of the houses of the Israelites by death at the time when the first-born of Egypt was slain. It was fulfilled at the cross, Christ being the Passover sacrifice (1 Cor. 5:7). The Feast of Unleavened Bread (Lev. 23:6-8) immediately followed Passover and lasted seven days (the first month from the 15th to the 22nd day). On the second day of this festival, the first half of the new harvest was symbolically offered to the Lord by a waving offering, accompanied with a lamb of the first year for burnt offering with its meat and drink offerings. This feast was perhaps fulfilled with the burial of Christ (1 Cor. 5:6-8). The Feast of First Fruits (Lev. 23:9-14) was observed in the first month on the sixteenth day. Offerings were given to express gratitude to God for the harvest. Christ was the first fruit of the resurrection, a sample of what was to come (1 Cor. 15:23). The Feast of Pentecost (Lev. 23:15-22) was observed in the third month, fifty days after Passover. The Scriptures do not attach any historical significance to this festival but seem to teach that Pentecost originates from the harvest, which terminated at this time. The Holy Spirit came on the Feast of Pentecost (Acts 2:1).

Pentecost was also known as “the feast of weeks” (Ex. 34:22; Deut. 16:10) and “the day of first fruits” (Num. 28:26; Ex. 23:16). It was called “the feast of weeks” because it was celebrated at the end of seven weeks (a week of weeks) from the second day of Pentecost or the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Alexander; Rackham). That means it fell on a Sunday (Wiersbe). It was called “the day of first fruits” because on that day, the first fruits of the wheat harvest (Ex. 34:22) were presented to God (Bruce).

In the second century, Judaism began to regard Pentecost as the day the Law was given at Sinai. There was a rabbinic tradition that God gave the Law in the languages of 70 nations of the world, but it is not certain that tradition was current in the first century (Marshall). It has been suggested that since the Jews celebrated the giving of the Law on Sinai at Pentecost, God gave the new law, written in the heart by the Holy Spirit, that day and that Pentecost was fulfilled by the gathering of the first fruits of the harvest of the world (Rackham).

Three of the Festivals were observed during the seventh month. The Feast of Trumpets (Lev. 23:23-25) began on the first day of the seventh month (Tisri, our October/November). The day was kept as a Sabbath, with no work being performed. Sacrifices were offered (Num. 29:1-6). This perhaps pictures the re-gathering of Israel at the Second Coming of Christ. The Day of Atonement (Lev. 23:26-32) was observed on the tenth day of the seventh month (Tisri, our September/October). The Feast of Tabernacles (Lev. 23:33-44) was also observed in the seventh month from the 15th to the 22nd day. It was instituted to remind the people that their fathers dwelt in tents in the wilderness (Lev. 23:43), and also to be an annual thanksgiving for all of the products of the earth: corn, fruit, wine, and oil that were gathered for the year (Lev. 23:39). During the eight days of this feast, the people dwelt in booths made of branches of palms and other trees. Perhaps this feast pictures the Kingdom.

Israel’s annual feasts were holidays similar to our Easter and Christmas. They symbolized spiritual truth and were also prophecies. The first four were fulfilled at Christ’s first coming, and the last three will be fulfilled when Christ comes again.

On the day of the Feast of Pentecost, which was on a Sunday (Bruce), the disciples gathered together in unity and harmony. Evidently, the “one place” was a house (2:2), perhaps the upper room (1:3; Rackham), although Wiersbe thinks it was the Temple (Acts 7:47).

The Sound “And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting” (2:2). As they were sitting in a house, a sound filled the whole house that sounded like a great gale of wind from heaven. The Greek word translated “wind” means “a blowing, blast, wind.” It is not the ordinary word for wind, but a stronger one indicating a “blast or gust” (Alexander). The phrase “from heaven” may refer to the supernatural origin of the wind as caused by God (Alexander). “A powerful tempestuous commotion of air by some extraordinary cause” filled the house (Alexander). Wind symbolizes the Holy Spirit (Ezek. 37:9-14; Jn. 3:8; Bruce). As a dove, representing the Holy Spirit, descended on Jesus at His baptism, so a wind, symbolizing the Holy Spirit, filled the house on the day of Pentecost (Rackham). The sound filling the whole house indicates that the 120 (1:15) must have occupied more than one chamber. The promised Holy Spirit had come.

The Sight “Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them” (2:3). What they experienced that day was not only audible (2:2), it was also visible (2:3). What they saw was tongues of fire lighted (“divided”) on each of them. As with the Burning Bush (Ex. 3:2-5), the fire denotes the divine presence (Rackham; Bruce). The burning Bush was on fire but not consumed.

Wiersbe says, “Combine wind and fire and you have—ablaze!”.

The Speaking “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (2:4). What had been promised was the baptism of the Holy Spirit (1:5), but what is said here is that they were filled with the Holy Spirit (Marshall). Technically, there is a difference between the baptism of the Holy Spirit and being filled with the Holy Spirit. On the day of Pentecost, both occurred simultaneously.

What is the significance of the *baptism* of the Holy Spirit? Acts, a history book, records what happened. The epistles explain what it means. For example, The Gospels are history books that record the crucifixion, but the epistles explain the theological significance of the death of Christ. Likewise, the book of Acts is a history book that tells what happened on the day of Pentecost. Paul says the baptism of the Holy Spirit places believers into Christ (Rom. 6:3-5) and into His body (1 Cor. 12:13). It is also the beginning of the church.

Let me explain. In the first place, there is no doubt that this is the beginning of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Acts 1:5 states that it is still in the future. Hence, it had to have begun after that. In Acts 11, Peter says that what happened to Cornelius (Acts 10:44-46) was the same thing that happened to them “at the beginning” (Acts 11:15-16). Thus, the baptism of the Holy Spirit had to have happened between Acts 1 and Acts 10. Acts 2 is the only logical candidate. Therefore, what happened on the day of Pentecost was the beginning of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, The baptism of the Holy Spirit places people into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). The body of Christ is the church (Eph. 1:22-23). Therefore, the beginning of the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Acts 11:15-16) is the birth of the church (Eph. 1:22-23; see also the TR of Acts 2:47). Also note, that the church was future in Matthew 16:18, but it exists in Acts (see the TR of 2:47; 5:11; 8:1, 8:3; etc.).

When does the baptism of the Holy Spirit take place? At Pentecost, it took place after they were converted because it was the first time it happened. After Pentecost, all who trust Christ receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit at conversion. In the book of Acts, except for three cases (Acts 2, 8 and 19, which will be explained as we come to those passages), there is no indication that believers receive the Holy Spirit after their conversion. Receiving the Holy Spirit after conversion was an extremely rare phenomenon, certainly not the norm. In the approximately 30 years covered in Acts, people received the Holy Spirit only three times after conversion. Moreover, the New Testament does not recognize the possibility of being a Christian apart from the possession of the Spirit (Jn. 3:5; Acts 11:17; Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 12:3; Gal. 3:2; 1 Thess. 1:5f.; Tit. 3:5; Heb. 6:4; 1 Pet. 1:2; 1 Jn. 3:24; 4:13). So, contrary to the Pentecostal movement, the baptism of the Holy Spirit is not a work of the Holy Spirit after conversion. All believers are baptized into the body of Christ at conversion (Rom. 8:9; Eph. 1:3; Col. 2:10). There are no commands or conditions for the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

They were also *filled* with the Holy Spirit. Some associate the filling of the Holy Spirit with power. Peter is used as an illustration. He was afraid of a servant girl, but after the filling of the Spirit, he boldly speaks before all of the people (Rackham). Others connect the filling of the Spirit with Spirit-inspired utterances, in this case, speaking in other languages (Marshall; see the next chapter, entitled, “The Filling of the Spirit”).

They spoke in tongues. The miracle was one of speaking, not hearing (Alexander). The Greek word translated “tongues” means “tongue, language.” The great debate is whether this is a known language or unintelligible sounds spoken in ecstasy. That question will be conclusively answered later in this passage.

The Confusion

The People “And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven” (2:5). At this point in the passage, Luke turns his attention to those “dwelling” in Jerusalem. This is not necessarily a reference to the permanent residents of Jerusalem (Marshall). It refers to those from every nation under heaven who had come to Jerusalem to observe Pentecost. They were all Jews or proselytes, not pagans. Nevertheless, they symbolized the universal need for the gospel (Marshall). It has been suggested that the disciples left the house where they were sitting and poured into the streets (Marshall), still speaking in tongues, which attracted the attention of a large crowd of people. Perhaps the crowd followed the disciples to the Temple, where Peter addressed them (Rackham; Bruce).

The Confusion “And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language” (2:6). The expression “this sound” describes the disciples speaking in tongues (Alexander). The disciples speaking in tongues confused the multitude because they heard everyone speak in his own language. This Greek word translated “language” means “language, dialect.” It is the Greek word from which we get the English word “dialect.” The use of this word indicates that the word “tongues” is a reference to a known human language.

Pentecost confuses people today. Today, the issues are the significance of the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the nature of tongues. Are tongues a human language or a heavenly language?

The Clarification

Their Amazement “Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, “Look, are not all these who speak Galileans?” And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born?” (2:7-8). Luke explains the confusion. The speakers were Galileans (2:7), but these Galileans were speaking languages from all over the world (2:8). The Greek word translated “amazed” means “to put out of its place, to drive one out of his senses,” hence, “be confounded, amazed.” Alexander says it means to be out of one’s normal condition and when applied to the intellect, it means to be beside oneself with strong emotion. It is the Greek word from which we get the English word “ecstasy.” They were beside themselves with wonder. The Greek word translated “marbled” means “to marvel, wonder.” In the vernacular of today, they were blown away.

Their Languages “Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes Cretans and Arabs; we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God” (2:9-11). Luke explains in detail the languages spoken. This leaves no doubt that tongues were a foreign language and not gibberish. The list of nations begins in the East and proceeds to the West. The first three denote races adjacent to the Caspian Sea, all belonging to the ancient Persian Empire (Alexander), modern Iran. “Here would be found the remains of the ten tribes and of the Babylonian captivity” (Rackham). With a change of construction, the record moves from the ancient Persian region to Macedonia, the land between Tigris and Euphrates. After Judah was mentioned, five Asia Minor provinces (modern Turkey) were named. Next, the list moves across the Mediterranean Sea to Africa and from there to Rome, representing the whole West (Alexander). Jews refers to those who are the physical descendants of Abraham, and proselytes are Gentile converts to Judaism. Cretans and Arabs

“complete the circle” (Alexander). This catalog is designed to represent every nation under heaven (2:5; Rackham). Perhaps there is the implication that these people from all over the known world would return to their own countries as witnesses to what happened (Marshall).

The Spirit-filled disciples spoke in all the above-mentioned languages about the wonderful works of God. They were praising God, not evangelizing (Wiersbe). Marshall says the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples in a new way, “accompanied by supernatural signs and causing them to burst out into the praise of God in languages other than their own.”

Their Question “So they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, ‘Whatever could this mean?’ Others mocking said, ‘They are full of new wine’” (2:12-13). Verse 12 is a repetition of verse 7. The word “amazed” is repeated and the word “perplexed” replaces the word “marveled.” The Greek word translated “perplexed” means “to be quite at a loss, to be in great perplexity.” They were utterly at a loss (Alexander). Some were perplexed, not about the tongues spoken or the message of the tongues, but about the *significance* of people speaking in languages they did not know. Others thought the speakers were drunk. The Judeans, who did not understand foreign languages, concluded the apostles were drunk and speaking gibberish (*NKJV Study Bible*). The primary reaction was incomprehension; they were at a loss to know what was happening (Marshall). This passage clarifies the nature of tongues. There is no question but that tongues in the New Testament were a human language, not a heavenly language. The Greek word translated “tongues” means “language.” Luke lists the languages spoken. Paul’s statement about the tongues of angels (1 Cor. 13:1) is not a reference to a heavenly language. Every time an angel spoke, he spoke in a human language. Paul’s reference to the Holy Spirit crying for believers (Rom. 8:26) does not refer to an unknown tongue because he says the Holy Spirit speaks in words that cannot be uttered.

Summary: On the Day of the Feast of Pentecost, the baptism of the Holy Spirit began with supernatural sights and sounds, and the speakers spoke in languages they did not know.

At Babel, languages caused partition in the human family. Pentecost is the reverse. All hear about the wonderful works of God in a language they understand. The voice of the Holy Spirit is intelligible to all in every nation; His presence brings them together. There is a parallel between the list of nations in Genesis 10 and the one in Acts 2 (Rackham).

Pentecost refers to the day of the Festival of Pentecost, which was the beginning of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. It was the fulfillment of the coming of the Holy Spirit. *It is not repeatable*. To repeat Pentecost, supernatural sights and sounds and speaking in multiple foreign languages would have to occur. You can no more repeat Pentecost than you can repeat Bethlehem.

The issue is the baptism of the Holy Spirit, not tongues. The baptism of the Holy Spirit places believers into Christ (Rom. 6:3-5) and His body (1 Cor. 12:13). Paul explains, “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For, in fact, the body is not one member but many. If the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,’ is it, therefore, not of the body? And if the ear should say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body,’ is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. And if they were all one member, where would the body be? But now, indeed, there are many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’; nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ No, much

rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty, but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another” (1 Cor. 12:13-25).

In the body’s proper function, believers use their gift to serve others. A paralyzed woman and a blind man crossing a street illustrate this proper functioning of the body. The paralyzed lady supplied eyes for the blind man, and the blind man gave his feet to the lame. She was in a wheelchair, using her eyes to look for the green light and he used his legs to push her across the street. The eye could not say to the feet, “I have no need of you.”

THE FILLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

When we hear the expression “the filling of the Holy Spirit,” we often immediately think of Pentecostalism or of the charismatic movement. They are the ones who speak of the ministry of the Holy Spirit, perhaps more than any other Christian group. However, they are not the only ones who speak about the filling of the Holy Spirit. I have heard many speakers who were neither part of Pentecostalism nor the charismatic movement talk about the filling of the Spirit. My problem is that most of what I have heard preached was not based on the Scripture. What does the Scripture teach about the filling of the Holy Spirit?

The filling occurred in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, the expression “the filling of the Spirit” appears almost exclusively in the writings of Luke, the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts. It only appears once in the epistles (Eph. 5:18).

In the Old Testament

Special Events In the Old Testament, the filling of the Holy Spirit was a sovereign act of God for a specific service. “Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: ‘See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, to design artistic works, to work in gold, in silver, in bronze, in cutting jewels for setting, in carving wood, and to work in all manner of workmanship’” (Ex. 31:1-5; see also 35:31-35).

Prophesying Sometimes, the filling of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament was associated with prophesying. “Then the LORD came down in the cloud, and spoke to him [Moses], and took of the Spirit that was upon him, and placed the same upon the seventy elders; and it happened, when the Spirit rested upon them, that they prophesied, although they never did so again” (Num. 11:25).

Temporary The filling of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament was sovereignty given to accomplish a special task. When the task was complete, the special filling was withdrawn. In Psalm 51, David prayed, “Do not take Your Holy Spirit from me” (Ps. 51:11). In his commentary on the Gospel of Luke, Geldenhuys says that during Old Testament times, the Holy Spirit descended upon people temporarily, fitted them for a task and departed (Geldenhuys, pp. 64-65).

Not the Norm It was not the normal experience in the daily lives of the Old Testament saints (Ice, p. 9).

In the Gospel of Luke

In the Gospel of Luke, only John the Baptist, Elizabeth, Zacharias, and Jesus are said to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Special Events As in the Old Testament, in the Gospel of Luke, the filling of the Holy Spirit was a sovereign act of God for a specific service. John the Baptist is said to be filled with the Spirit *from his mother’s womb* (Lk. 1:15).

Prophesying When Elizabeth (Lk. 1:41) and Zacharias (Lk. 1:67) are said to be filled with the Holy Spirit, what happens next is they spoke the Word of God (Lk. 1:42-55 and Lk. 1:67-79). Zacharias is said to prophesy (Lk. 1:67).

Wisdom Jesus is said to be filled with wisdom (Lk. 2:40) and the Holy Spirit (Lk. 4:1).

In the Book of Acts

Special Filling In the book of Acts, Luke uses two different expressions to refer to the filling of the Holy Spirit. As in his Gospel, he speaks of people being filled with the Spirit (Acts 2:4; 4:8; 4:31; 9:17; 13:9). This expression emphasizes an event, not a state (Ekholm, pp. 37-38). In other words, it was instantaneous.

Notice no one was commanded to seek the filling of the Holy Spirit. There were no conditions; God sovereignly filled the recipients (see the passive voice of the Greek verb “filling”).

Believers were filled with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost and spoke with tongues (2:4). Hodges argues that Luke’s description of the filling of the Spirit at Pentecost seems to be virtually equivalent to inspiration. He points out that in Luke’s Gospel, the filling of the Spirit is linked with John’s prophetic career and with his parent’s transparently ecstatic utterances (Lk. 1:15, 41, 67). Marshall says that the verb translated “addressed” (“said” in 2:14) can be used of inspired utterance (see also 2:17-18; 11:28). When Peter was filled with the Spirit, He immediately spoke the Word of God (4:8). The believers who were filled with the Holy Spirit “spoke the Word of God with boldness” (4:31). Paul was filled with the Spirit (9:17) and spoke the Word of God (13:9).

Evidently, it was repeatable (see Peter in 2:4 and in 4:31 and Paul in 9:17 and 13:9). The fillings lasted as long as it took to accomplish the given task (Peter and Paul). The purpose of the filling was for a special prophetic activity or for boldness in their witness of the Word of God. Ice concludes that since these fillings produced prophetic utterances, which only occurred in the first century, there are no such sovereign fillings today (Ice, p. 9).

The State of Fullness Luke also speaks of people being *full* of the Holy Spirit (6:3, 6:5; 7:55; 11:24; 13:52). This expression describes an abiding condition instead of an event (Ekholm, pp. 42-42). The action of filling has occurred; a state of fullness has been achieved (Crater, p. 33). In other words, this is like saying a man is “full of wisdom.” He is exceedingly wise and, therefore, is said to be full of wisdom. Hence, people full of the Holy Spirit consistently exhibit the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives, which indicates that their state did not come instantaneously (as in a sovereign filling), but through a growth process.

The Seven were full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom (6:3). Stephen was full of faith (6:5, 6:8), the Holy Spirit (6:5; 7:55) and wisdom (6:5). Barnabas was full of the Holy Spirit and faith (11:24). Disciples were filled “with joy and with the Holy Spirit” (13:52), that is, they were filled with joy, which comes from the indwelling Holy Spirit (Bruce).

In the writings of Luke, *the filling* of the Spirit is associated with speaking an inspired utterance (Lk. 1:41, 1:67; Acts 2:14; see also Acts 11:28), wisdom (Lk. 2:40; Acts, 6:3, 6:5), faith (6:5, 6:8, 11:24), and joy (13:52). People said to be *full* of the Holy Spirit are being characterized as spiritual people.

In Ephesians 5:18

The Meaning Paul says, “And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18). It is immediately obvious that this is not what Luke calls the “filling” of the Spirit, that is, a special event. When Luke uses the term “filled with the Holy Spirit,” he describes a sovereign act of God that is not commanded, nor does it have any conditions. Remember, John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit in his mother’s womb. That was a sovereign act of God; John did not do anything. Paul, however, *commands* believers to be filled; they are somehow involved. Furthermore, the Greek construction in Ephesians 5:18 is different from the one Luke uses, and it is in the present tense.

Pardon the pun, but Paul’s command is filled with problems. In the Greek text, the construction of “be filled with the Spirit” is unusual (Eadie). One commentator says, “There is a certain strangeness about the construction in Greek” (Foulkes). There is no article before the word “spirit” and the preposition “with” is “in.” Thus, the Greek text reads, “be filled *in* Spirit” (see *Young’s Literal Translation*).

Even though the Greek text reads “be filled in Spirit,” virtually all English translations render it, “be filled *with* the Spirit.” It is commonly assumed that this imperative means that believers are to be filled *with* the Holy Spirit, as if the Holy Spirit is the substance with which one is filled, like a glass filled with water. This Greek construction does not mean “be filled *with* the Spirit” (Hoehner). If that were what Paul intended, he would have used another Greek construction (Robinson). As F. F. Bruce points out, “Paul does not say, ‘become full of the Spirit,’ but ‘be filled in Spirit.’”

The Greek construction of this command can mean, “Be filled *in* the Spirit,” meaning being filled in the realm of the Holy Spirit (*TDNT*, 2, pp. 540-41). The idea of the sphere is in Romans 8:9, where Paul says believers are not “in the flesh, but in the Spirit.” What does it mean to be filled in the sphere of the Holy Spirit? In Ephesians 5, the filling is associated with walking in wisdom and understanding God’s will. Before Paul mentions being filled, he says, “Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is” (Eph. 5:17). The sphere of the Holy Spirit, the author of the written Word of God, is the will and wisdom of God.

The Greek construction of this command can also mean “be filled *by* the Holy Spirit” (see “shall we strike with (by) the sword” in Lk. 22:49; Moule, *Idiom Book*, pp. 76-77; Hoehner). Robinson translates it, “Let your fullness be that which comes through the Holy Spirit.” Bruce renders it, “Let your fullness be that which the Holy Spirit produces.” If that is the meaning, the content of the filling is not explicitly stated, but it may refer to the fullness of the moral excellence and the power of God mentioned in Ephesians 1:23 (Hoehner).

In the Scripture, the Holy Spirit is repeatedly connected to wisdom. Isaiah wrote, “There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots. The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD” (Isa. 11:1-2). Jesus was said to be filled with wisdom (Lk. 2:40) before He was filled with the Holy Spirit (Lk. 4:1). The apostles instructed the believers at Jerusalem to “Seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business” (6:3). They chose Stephen and six others (6:5). Later the unbelievers to whom he spoke “were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke” (6:10).

In Ephesians 5:18, Paul says, “Be filled with the Spirit” and that one result is singing. In Colossians 3:16, He says, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” and adds that one of the

results is singing. It has been suggested that since the result of being filled with the Spirit and the Word dwelling in believers richly both result in the same thing, they are the same thing.

Still others combine the concepts of “by” and “in” (Alford; Ellicott; Fee). Alford concludes, Let the Spirit “be the region in, and the ingredient with which you are filled.” That view has been criticized as being a “needless refinement” (Salmond), but maybe this unusual phrase was chosen to combine the concepts of both “in” and “by.” From other passages, it is clear that the Holy Spirit empowers believers (Eph. 3:16).

The Misconceptions There has been a great deal of confusion concerning filling the Holy Spirit. One of the misconceptions is that the filling of the Spirit happens “once for all” or in a crisis experience that may be repeated. The filling of the Spirit is not a “once-for-all all experience” (Foulkes) or a crisis experience. The command in Ephesians 5:18 is in the present tense!

Another misunderstanding concerns the concept of control. Many say that the filling of the Holy Spirit means the control of the Holy Spirit. For example, Charles Hodge says, “Men are said to be filled with wine when completely under its influence; so they are said to be filled with the Spirit when he controls all their thoughts, feelings, words, and actions.” There is truth to that concept, but it needs to be clarified.

The filling of the Spirit is sometimes described in such a way as to suggest that the Holy Spirit is in absolute control of a person as if the believer is no longer in control. Believers are to get off the throne of their lives and put Jesus on the throne. Or, to use another illustration, the filling is like driving a car. When you are in the driver’s seat, you are in control; you must get in the back seat and let Jesus drive the car. The point of both of these illustrations is that in this view of the filling of the Spirit, Jesus is in *total control* and you are passive and not in control at all. The problem with that explanation of the control of the Spirit is that it teaches that believers are not in control of themselves, contrary to the Scripture. The fruit of the Spirit is self-control.

Besides, it doesn’t work. Years ago, I was speaking for a pastor who had recently discovered the “wonderful truth of the filling of the Spirit.” He shared his experience with me as we rode down the highway in his car. He was driving; I was sitting beside him in the front seat. During the conversation, I asked him, “Are you filled with the Spirit right this minute?” He said, “I have met all the conditions for filling the Spirit.” I said, “You’re fudging. I want to know if you are filled with the Spirit right at this minute?” He said, “I think I have every reason to believe that the Spirit of God has filled me. I said, “You’re hedging. Are you filled with the Spirit?” He finally had to admit that he must be filled with the Spirit because he had met the conditions he was taught for the filling. I said, “Now let me clarify. That means that the Lord is in control of you right now and you are not in control of yourself.” He said, “Yes, that’s right.” I said, “I have two problems with that. The first is that if that is true, what is coming out of your mouth are the words of God, which means what you say is tantamount to inspiration. The second problem I have with that is you are speeding?”

It would be better to say that Holy Spirit is in control in the sense that He ultimately determines what is done. A better illustration of the “control” of the Holy Spirit is that you are in the front seat, behind the steering wheel, driving the car, in control, and the Lord is sitting beside you, telling you to turn left, to go straight, or to turn right. In that sense, He is in control, and so are you. That is the filling, or if you will, the control of the Holy Spirit. The directions He gives us come from the Word of God. The Spirit of God, through His Word, is directing and controlling. Any explanation that suggests a believer is no longer in control is not biblical.

It is often suggested that as a drunk man is out of control, the believer who is filled with the Spirit is out of control. A drunk man is not totally out of control; he is under the influence.

The Result What are the results of the filling of the Spirit? In his commentary on the New Testament, MacDonald writes, “Does a person know when he is filled with Spirit? The closer we are to the Lord, the more we are conscious of our own complete unworthiness and sinfulness (Isa. 6:1-5). In His presence, we find nothing in our souls to be proud of (Luke 5:8). We are unaware of any spiritual superiority over others or sense of ‘having arrived.’ The believer filled with the Spirit is occupied with Christ, not with self. At the same time, he may realize that God is working in and through his life.”

Lewis Sperry Chafer says being filled with the Spirit is “*conformity* to His mind and will.” He goes on to say, “The Spirit’s work is to produce Christian character (Gal. 5:22-23), Christian service by the exercise of a gift (1 Cor. 12:4-7), knowledge of the Scripture through the teaching ministry of the Spirit (John 16:12-15; cf. Rom. 8:14, 16, 26, 27; 1 John 2:27); but in this context (Eph. 5) it has pleased the Spirit to mention only the fact that the Spirit-filled life is one of ceaseless *praise* and *gratitude* (verses 19-20)” (Chafer’s commentary on Ephesians).

Following the imperative of verse 18 are five participles, the results of being filled in the realm of the Holy Spirit. Wiersbe says that believers who are filled with the Spirit are joyful (5:19), thankful (5:20), and submissive (5:21-33).

A man in his 50s, who had been a believer all his adult life, was talking to me about the filling of the Holy Spirit. During the conversation, he said he had a bad attitude at work, and his boss knew it. I asked if his boss knew he was a Christian and he said, “I would be embarrassed if the people at work knew I was a Christian.” How would the people who work with you describe you? Would they say you are a joyful, grateful, submissive servant? Or would they say you are full of yourself, full of complaints, full of anger, or full of football?

Summary: In the Bible, the *filling* of the Spirit was an event and being *full* of the Spirit was a state of connection with wisdom. Believers today are commanded to be filled by means of the Holy Spirit, which means they are filled with the wisdom of God and are depending on the Spirit of God to give them the power to do the will of God with the evidence of joy, gratitude, and submission.

What do believers have to do to be filled with the Holy Spirit? The work of the Holy Spirit in the believers takes place as they walk by faith (Eph. 3:16; Gal. 2:20), that is, they trust Him for wisdom gleaned from the Word and depend on Him for the power to do what the Word says. As believers walk by faith, the Holy Spirit works quietly behind the scenes to enable the believer to obey the Word of God.

If you do not have the evidence, you are not full of the Holy Spirit. When I first got out of seminary, I had a series of sermons on filling the Holy Spirit. I had the filling reduced to a formula, a series of steps that, if followed, meant you are filled with the Spirit. It was the kind of thing that I had heard others preach.

Then one day, I was sitting at my desk reading the book of Galatians. I came upon the passage that says the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, etc. That is as far as I got. I looked at that passage and then at my life. I realized that I was not a patient person. It hit me. If I didn’t have the fruit of the Spirit, I didn’t have the right formula for how to be filled with the Spirit. That experience began a journey that ended with me understanding that the filling of the Spirit is being filled with the wisdom of God and is dependent upon the Spirit of God to do the will of God.

YOU CHRISTIANS ARE CRAZY!

Many people think Christians are crazy. Some claim we are crazy because we, according to them, forgo some pleasures in life. Some are convinced that we believe in fables, not facts. Some conclude that we sometimes act as if we are on drugs. The charge is not new. In fact, it was the first charge leveled at the church the day it was born! How do you handle such accusations? How did the early Christians handle it?

We Are Not Drunk

When believers spoke in tongues on the day of Pentecost, some mockingly said, “They are full of new wine” (2:13). The initials D.D. behind a minister’s name indicate he has received the honorary degree of “Doctor of Divinity.” A policeman who didn’t know the significance of these letters asked what they meant. When he heard the answer, he replied, “Well, down at the police station, that’s the most common entry on the charge sheet. To us, D.D. means ‘Drunk and Disorderly.’”

Peter’s Address “But Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said to them, ‘Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and heed my words’” (2:14). He stood up with the eleven, indicating that he was the representative for the group. He was their spokesman (Rackham). He addresses the crowd as “men of Judea,” that is, Jews in Judea and as those who “dwell in Jerusalem,” that is, foreign Jews (Alexander).

Peter’s Assertion Peter begins his message by describing what they were thinking. He answers the accusation that they were drunk by saying, “For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is *only* the third hour of the day” (2:15). Peter charges they have made an accusation based on an assumption (“as you suppose”). Peter denies their assumption. He claims they are not drunk because it is too early in the day; it is only the third hour, 9 am (Rackham). Granted, it would be possible for people to be drunk that early in the morning, but Jews did not ordinarily eat that early, much less drink wine (Marshall). Paul says, “For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night” (1 Thess. 5:7). Furthermore, “Jews abstain from eating and drinking on a holy day until later in the day” (*NKJV Study Bible*).

When falsely accused, give a reasonable explanation (1 Pet. 3:15). For example, the answer to the objection about Jonah being swallowed by a big fish is there are cases of that happening in modern times.

Prophecy Is Being Fulfilled

Peter quotes Joel 2:28-32. “But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel” (2:16). Peter goes on to explain that what they are witnessing is not intoxication but inspiration (Alexander).

God will send His Spirit “And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your young men shall see visions, Your old men shall dream dreams and on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; and they shall prophesy” (2:17-18). The

“last days” have been taken to mean the Christian era (Rackham; Bruce; see Heb. 1:3; 1 Jn. 2:18). Joel prophesied that God would pour out His Spirit on all mankind, including both genders, all ages, and all ranks, not just prophets (Num. 11:29). Men and women, young and old, even servants will prophesy. They will dream dreams at night and see visions during the daytime. The coming of the Holy Spirit on all flesh explains men and women speaking in tongues (Alexander; Hodges).

God will show Signs “I will show wonders in heaven above and signs in the earth beneath: Blood and fire and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD” (2:19-20). Joel prophesied that God would show wonders and signs in heaven and earth. Wonders and signs are expressions for miracles (Alexander). Wonders are miracles that cause awe and amazement and signs are miracles that point to a message. The day of the Lord is the day of the Lord’s appearance in final judgment and the restoration of all things (Rackham).

God will Save “And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the LORD Shall be saved” (2:21). Joel prophesied that God would save those who called on His name. Alexander points out that applying the word “Lord” in the New Testament to Jesus Christ is “a strong proof of his divinity.”

Peter’s use of Joel has been explained in several different ways. Some claim that Peter says all of Joel’s prophecy was fulfilled at Pentecost. For that to be the case, the supernatural signs must be interpreted figuratively. Rackham thinks that some of this was fulfilled at the destruction of Jerusalem.

Others contend that all of Joel will be fulfilled in the future, and Peter only uses it as an illustration. For example, Tan says Joel foretold an outpouring of the Spirit with supernatural signs just before the kingdom age. Peter uses Joel’s prophecy by way of illustration and application. According to Tan, Peter did not say all that Joel prophesied came to pass at Pentecost. That did not happen. Tan states, “Peter does not say that Joel’s entire prophecy was fulfilled that day at Pentecost. The customary formula of fulfillment (‘that it might be fulfilled’) is not used by Peter, but the introductory ‘this is what’ is a phrase not customarily used for the actual, complete fulfillment of any prophecy. Peter desires to point out to the Jews that what is taking place among them is not something unheard of or induced under intoxication but something actually conformed with their Old Testament Scriptures. Peter simply said that the Jews ought not to be surprised at the manifestation of the power of the Holy Spirit since the Old Testament prophet predicted that the Spirit would come upon the nation of Israel in a future time” (Tan, pp. 184-85).

Another possibility is that Peter says that part of what Joel predicted was fulfilled at Pentecost, but not all. The outpouring of the Spirit predicted by Joel was fulfilled at Pentecost (Hodges adds that this is not synonymous with the “mystery” of the church, which involves the oneness of Jew and Gentile in Christ). The miraculous signs mentioned by Joel are literal and will be fulfilled just before the Day of the Lord. Therefore, that part of the passage is still in the future (Hodges). Peter quoted that portion of Joel to include the statement about calling on the name of the Lord. (Hodges’ class notes; see also his article in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, pp. 167-179). Marshall calls Pentecost the “beginning” of fulfilling the outpouring of the Spirit. There will be a complete fulfillment later before the Day of the Lord.

Notice Peter used Scripture. Do not be afraid to use the Word; it is a sword. “The word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the

heart” (Heb. 4:12). You never know what will happen. When Peter spoke at Pentecost, 3000 people got saved.

Jesus Is the Messiah

Jesus worked Miracles “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know” (2:22). The transition from Joel’s prophecy to a discussion of Jesus seems abrupt and arbitrary. Alexander suggests that the connection is the word “Lord.” Having just said that whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord should be saved, Peter does not answer the question, “What Lord?” He does not identify the Lord yet.

Peter began addressing them as natives of Judea and professors of Judaism. Now, he appeals to the people of Jerusalem, not the visitors to the city (Bruce). Peter points out that Jesus worked miracles and that they were well aware that He did because He did them in their midst. Those miracles, done by God through Jesus, demonstrated to them who He was. The Greek word translated “attested” means “to bring out, show forth, exhibit, declare, prove, proclaim.”

Jesus was Crucified “Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death” (2:23). Even though Jesus worked miracles, He was crucified. Peter mentions two things concerning the crucifixion of Jesus. The death of Christ was according to the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God. The Greek word translated “determined” means “to determine, appoint, designate.” The one rendered “purpose” means “to determine, resolves.” The death of Christ did not take God by surprise. He determined beforehand that Jesus should die. The death of Christ was the will of God (Rackham). The death of Christ was carried out by lawless hands. Those with lawless hands are those without the law (1 Cor. 9:21), Gentiles. This refers to Pontius Pilate in the Roman soldiers (Alexander; Bruce; Marshall). The foreknowledge of God did not relieve the human agents from their guilt in the death of Christ (Rackham). Marshall says, “Here we have the paradox of divine predestination and human free will in its strongest form.”

Jesus was Raised from the Dead “Whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it” (2:24). “When God gave Him up, they took Him up; but when they crucified Him, God raised Him. This is a favorite antithesis with Peter and repeatedly occurs in his discourses (see below, on 3:14-15; 4:10; 5:30-31; 10:39-40)” (Alexander). “The abyss can no more hold the Redeemer than a pregnant woman can hold a child in her body” (Bertram, cited by Bruce).

“For David says concerning Him: ‘I foresaw the LORD always before my face, For He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken. Therefore, my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad; Moreover, my flesh also will rest in hope. For You will not leave my soul in Hades, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. You have made known to me the ways of life; You will make me full of joy in Your presence’” (2:25-28). Death couldn’t hold Him (2:24) because (“for”) David prophesied that Messiah would rise from the dead. Peter quotes Psalm 16:8-11. David spoke about *his* soul not being left in Hades and God’s Holy One not seeing corruption. The Greek word translated “Hades” means “the abode of Hades, the underworld” and in the New Testament, it is used of the abode of departed spirits (A-S). It is “the world of the spirits, the state of the soul separated from the body, without any reference to happiness or misery” (Alexander). Here, it means the grave. David also spoke about God not allowing His Holy One to see corruption, which he explains in the following verses.

“Men *and* brethren, let *me* speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day” (2:29). Peter argues that David spoke of resurrection, but, as they all knew, he died, was buried, and his tomb was well known to all. His tomb is mentioned in Nehemiah 3:16 and by Josephus (Josephus, *Antiquity of the Jews* 7.393; 13.249; 16.179-83.)

“Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne” (2:30). David knew God promised him that one of his descendants, the Messiah, would sit on His throne (Marshall), a reference to the promise contained in 2 Samuel 7:12-16 and repeated in Psalm 89:3-4 and Psalm 132:11 (Alexander). A Qumran text (4 Q Florilegium) interprets 2 Samuel 7:10 as a reference to the Messiah (Marshall).

“He, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption” (2:31). According to Peter, David was “consciously prophesying” the resurrection of the Messiah, and not that there was a deeper sense in David’s words than he himself was not aware (Marshall). He specifically points to the part of the passage that says that His soul would not be left in Hades, nor would His flesh see corruption (13:35-37). Some suggest that the “fulfillments” pointed out in the New Testament are mostly typology (Glenn, pp. 39-51; Bateman II, pp. 438-53). Hodges disagrees. He says that Psalm 16 does not refer to David “*at all*, since David experienced no resurrection prior to his body experience of resurrection” (Hodges, *Dispensationalism*, p. 175, 180 fn. #18).

“This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses” (2:32). Having established from the Scripture that the Messiah would be raised from the dead, Peter boldly declares that Jesus is the one God resurrected and we are all witnesses. “We” refers primarily to the twelve apostles (2:14).

“If you were asked to give in one sentence the distinctive characteristic that makes Christianity different from all the religions of the world, what would you say? I believe we can sum up the one outstanding thing that sets it apart from all the rest by the following brief resume: ‘Christianity alone has a living founder and author.’ All other religions claim the authority of founders who are now dead. Only Christianity has a founder who was dead but now is alive! Not even the most bigoted, fanatical devotee of the religions of the world would dare claim their leader is alive today. The emblem of the world’s religions is a sealed tomb, while the symbol of the message of Christ is an empty—cross and an empty tomb! The representative token of true Christianity is not a crucifix—a dead Christ on a cross—but rather an empty cross and an empty tomb! This alone sets the message of Christianity apart from all others. Paul understood this when he wrote: ‘But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross (the empty cross) of our Lord Jesus Christ’ (Gal. 6:14). This was the message of the apostles” (*Our Daily Bread*, 5/15/1965).

Jesus sent the Holy Spirit “Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear” (2:33). Peter concludes Jesus was not only resurrected; He was also exalted to the right hand of God, where He poured out the Holy Spirit which is what they see. This was the promise of the Father (Jn. 16:7; 14:16).

“For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself: ‘The LORD said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand till I make Your enemies Your footstool” (2:34-35). Peter explains (“for”) the ascension of Christ by quoting Psalm 110:1. Jesus used this same Psalm of Himself (Mt. 22:41-46). Peter uses the same logic here as he did in expounding Psalm 16, namely, that

what was said was not fulfilled by David. It could only be fulfilled by One who ascended into heaven and sat down at God's right hand. The "right hand" is a position of authority. Jesus received the promised gift of the Spirit by virtue of His exaltation, which He poured out upon His people (Marshall).

Progressive Dispensationalists use this passage to teach that Jesus is sitting on the throne of David now. Bock argues that the word "sit" (2:30) is "reintroduced" in the quotation from Psalm 110, meaning that "his throne" in verse 30 is equal to sitting at the right hand of God in verse 34 (Bock, p. 49). The word "sit" does not mean that sitting on the Davidic Throne (2:30) is the same as sitting at the right hand of God (2:35). Hebrews makes it clear that Jesus is seated at the right hand of God (Heb. 1:3), where He is waiting until His enemies are made His footstool (Heb. 10:12-13). Hodges points out that Peter quotes each psalm in support of two different points in his presentation. He quotes Psalm 16 to support the resurrection and he quotes Psalm 110 to support the claim that the seated Christ is the Source of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The link between the two quotations is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (for a more detailed discussion, see Hodges, "A Dispensational Understanding of Acts 2," pp. 172-178).

Jesus is the Messiah "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (2:36). The conclusion ("therefore") of the whole sermon is that Israel is to know that the One they crucified was both Lord and Messiah. The word "Lord" is used in the highest sense, as the New Testament applies to Him passages in the Old Testament referring to Yahweh, such as Joel 2:32 (Bruce). It is used of God in this passage (2:39).

This is the first Christian sermon. It has been called one of the greatest sermons ever preached (Hodges). It contains insights into preaching. Peter starts where they are in their thinking ("drunk" in 2:15) and relates it to where they are ("miracles" in 2:22). It is filled with Scripture (20 of 52 lines are Scripture). There are only two or three personal pronouns in Peter's sermon.

Do you know the Scripture? Do you know the Old Testament? S. Lewis Johnson, the head of the Greek department at Dallas Seminary, used to suggest to his students that they tear the New Testament from the Bible for one year. If the Old Testament were our only Bible, we would know more about the Old Testament.

Under his mother's guidance, Harry Ironside began to memorize Scripture when he was three years old. By age 14, he had read through the Bible 14 times. During the rest of his life, he read through the Bible at least once a year (Hughes, p. 40). Years before I attended Dallas Seminary, Harry Ironside spoke there often. One of the stories about him I heard when I was a student was that one morning at breakfast, the students talked about what they had read before breakfast. One turned to Dr. Ironside and asked what he had read. He replied, "Isaiah."

Summary: The believers were not drunk; they were experiencing the prophesied coming of the Holy Spirit, who the crucified, prophesied resurrected, and prophesied ascended Jesus poured out, demonstrating He is the Messiah

In the context of Acts, this episode shows that the Lord works by the Holy Spirit through people. As Peter spoke, the Lord worked. When opposed, you can be silent, avoid the issue, or calmly answer the charge, talk about Jesus, and watch the Lord work.

How would you like to be like Christ? Peter was like Christ; he responded reasonably to their charge, used the Scriptures, and presented Jesus as the Messiah. In John 8, the enemies of Jesus charged Him with being demon-possessed. "Jesus answered, 'I do not have a demon, but I honor

My Father, and you dishonor Me” (Jn. 8:49). Later, Jesus claimed that if they merely keep His word, they will never die. To them, that was proof that He had a demon. “The Jews said to Him, ‘Now we know that You have a demon! Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and You say, ‘If anyone keeps My word, he shall never taste death.’ Are You greater than our father Abraham, who is dead? And the prophets are dead. Whom do You make Yourself out to be?’” (Jn. 8:52-53).

Throughout the debate, Jesus pressed home who He is. In John 8, He claims: I am the light of the world (Jn. 8:12), I know My origin and destiny (Jn. 8:14), I judge no man (Jn. 8:15), I am from above (Jn. 8:23), I am not of this world (Jn. 8:23), I speak what I hear from My Father (Jn. 8:26, 29, 38), I am of God (8:42), I know God (Jn. 8:55) before Abraham was, I AM (Jn. 8:58). On the other hand, notice His charges against them: you do not know My origin or destiny (Jn. 8:14), you judge after the flesh (Jn. 8:15), you are from beneath (Jn. 8:23), you are of this world (Jn. 8:23), you shall die in your sins (Jn. 8:24), you do what you see your father do (Jn. 8:38), you are of your father the devil (Jn. 8:44), you’re not of God (Jn. 8:47), you do not know God (Jn. 8:55). When people want to argue concerning the person of Jesus, follow the example of Jesus. Do not argue about minor matters. Do not be argumentative, but argue in the sense of a lawyer presenting a case. Press home the issue of who Jesus is and what He did.

WHAT IS A NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH?

What kind of church would you like your church to be, one with a gifted speaker, inspiring music, or programs that meet your needs? For many, the answer is all of the above. Would you prefer a large church or a small church? How would the Lord answer that question? Since the church belongs to Him, not us, perhaps we should ask Him. His answer is in the New Testament. All churches claim they are New Testament churches. What does the New Testament church look like? What are the activities of the New Testament church? As we have seen, the church began on the day of Pentecost. The day the church was born, it began practicing characteristics of the New Testament church.

The Church Consists of Believers

The Sermon When the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost, the disciples spoke in tongues (2:1-13). Peter preached the first Christian sermon in response to being accused of being drunk (2:14-36).

The Response “Now when they heard *this*, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?’” (2:37). Those who heard Peter’s sermon were convicted of being party to the crucifixion of the Messiah. The Greek word translated “cut” means “to strike or prick violently, stun, to be smitten” and is used of strong emotion (A-S). Alexander says that the context, not necessarily the word itself, suggests a reference to the conscience. They asked Peter and the rest of the apostles what they should do now. Peter had stood up “with the eleven” (2:14). Hence, they addressed their question to the apostles as a group. Although not developed, in quoting Joel, Peter mentioned the coming divine judgment (“the day of the Lord” in 2:20). They asked what they had to do to be saved (2:21) from this divine judgment.

The Exhortation “Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’” (2:38). Although their question was addressed to all of the apostles (2:37), Peter, being the spokesman, answered. He told them they had to repent and be baptized. The Greek word translated “repent” means “afterthought, to change one’s mind.” It is not sorry for sin. Strong emotion (2:37) and even sorry (2 Cor. 7:9) may precede repentance, but emotion and sorrow are not part of repentance. The goodness of God may also lead to repentance (Rom. 2:4). In the context of Acts 2, repentance is a change of the mind about Jesus Christ and it includes believing (2:44). They were to be baptized “in the name of Jesus Christ,” that is, by His authority (Alexander). At the baptism, the formula was “in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” (Mt. 28:19).

This baptism was “for the remission of sins.” Does that mean baptism is necessary for the remission of sins? In both Greek and English, the word “for” can mean either “to get” or “because of.” Those who teach that baptism is necessary for salvation interpret the word “for” in Acts 2:38 to mean “to get.” Another possibility is that the word “for” in Acts 2:38 means “because of.” Matthew 12:41 says the men of Nineveh “repented at the preaching of Jonah.” In the Septuagint (LXX), the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Greek word translated

“at” is the same one rendered “for” in Acts 2:38. The men of Nineveh did not repent to get the preaching of Jonah. They repented because of the preaching of Jonah. The question is, “Which interpretation of the word “for” in Acts 2:38 is correct?” Nothing in the context settles the issue. All must go to other passages to validate their position. Ideally, it would be nice if we could go to another passage *spoken* by Peter and *recorded* by Luke.

Such a passage exists. In Acts 10, while preaching in the house of Cornelius, Peter said, “To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive the remission of sins” (Acts 10:43). Clearly, Peter said and Luke recorded that faith is the key to receiving the remission of sins. In this passage, it is evident that Peter did not preach that baptism was necessary for the remission of sins. In fact, after the people who heard him believed in Christ in the middle of his message, Peter said, “Can anyone forbid water that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have” (Acts 10:47)? Unmistakably these people believed, were saved, and received the Holy Spirit *before* they were baptized. Based on the data from Acts 10, it is safe to say that on the day of Pentecost, Peter did not mean one had to be baptized *to* receive the remission of sins. As Acts 10 demonstrates, Peter preached the remission of sins by faith and he practiced baptism after salvation. In fact, in a similar passage in the next chapter (3:19), the forgiveness of sins is a direct consequence of repenting and nothing is said about baptism (Bruce). The same is true of Paul’s message when he preached forgiveness (13:38-39).

Those who responded correctly would receive the Holy Spirit. In other words, they would receive the same gift bestowed on the apostles themselves (Bruce).

The Explanation “For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call” (2:39). Peter explains (“for”) this applies to them, to their children, to those in distant lands, and to all whom God will call in the future. The word “children” cannot be used as a justification for infant baptism (Marshall). Those who gladly *received the word* were baptized (2:41). God calls people and those who respond call on the Lord (see 2:21).

“And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, ‘Be saved from this perverse generation’” (2:40). Not everything Peter said is recorded. The Greek word translated “exhorted” means “to call, summons, beseech, entreat, admonish, exhort,” as well as “to cheer, encourage, comfort.” Alexander says it includes the ideas of summoning, commanding, and persuading. He adds, “They testify to what men should believe and exhorted them to what they ought to do.”

The sum of what he had to say was that they should do what he said to be saved from their perverse generation. The Greek word translated “perverse” means “curved, bent, winding” and is used figuratively of that which is “crooked, perverse, unjust.” This is an echo of what Jesus said (Lk. 9:41; 11:29). Marshall points out that the expression “perverse generation” was used in the Old Testament of the Israelites who rebelled against God in the wilderness (Deut. 32:5) and is used in the New Testament of those who reject the Lord (Phil. 2:15; Heb. 3:10).

A New Testament church consists of believers. The first church members were the 120 who the Holy Spirit baptized on Pentecost. After Peter’s sermon, others believed. The Lord was adding to the church (2:47). If a group of people formed an organization and called it a church, but the members had not trusted Christ, it would not be a church in the New Testament sense of the term. A New Testament church consists of people who have been converted.

The Church Consists of Baptized Believers

Their Response “Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them” (2:41). Notice, those who heard the word were baptized. A New Testament church consists of people who are old enough to hear the word, believe in Christ, and get baptized. Baptism is for believers, not infants. Before the Protestant Reformation, people born in Europe were automatically baptized as infants and were automatically members of the Roman Catholic church. The Reformers preached that people had to be saved by faith, but they kept practicing infant baptism. Another group declared that the reformers had not gone far enough because, as stated in the New Testament, baptism is for believers. These radical Reformers were called Anabaptists. Ana is the Greek word for “again.” The Catholics and the Reformers said these people have already been baptized; you are baptizing them again. The Anabaptists replied that they were being a New Testament church.

Their Number Three thousand responded and were baptized. John Wesley and George Whitefield preached to crowds larger than 3000 without the aid of a public address system. In 1744, George Whitefield preached in Philadelphia. In his autobiography, Benjamin Franklin says he measured the crowd that Whitefield spoke to and estimated that he preached to 30,000 people. (<http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/becomingamer/ideas/text2/franklinwhitefield.pdf>. has a copy of Franklin’s autobiography). If the disciples shared the task of baptizing, there would have been time for them to baptize 3000 people (Marshall).

The Church Consists of a Committed Community

“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers” (2:42). After they were baptized, they steadfastly continued in several practices. The Greek word translated “continued steadfastly” means “to attend constantly, continue steadfastly, adhere to” (1:14; 6:4).

Apostles’ Doctrine They constantly listened to the Apostles teach. The Greek word translated “doctrine” means “teaching, doctrine” (that which is taught). The apostles taught what Jesus had taught them. After His resurrection and before His ascension, Jesus taught the apostles that the Old Testament indicated the Messiah would suffer and be raised from the dead (Lk. 24:44-45). He also commissioned them to teach all He had commanded (Mt. 28:19). Eventually, the apostles’ teaching was written. It is the New Testament. Rackham suggests that the elementary principles of the teaching are given in Hebrews 6:1-3. A New Testament church consists of baptized believers learning the Word of God.

Fellowship They continued to fellowship with one another. The Greek word rendered “fellowship” means “fellowship, communion.” Alexander says it can be applied to mutual communion in meals, the Lord’s Supper, and charitable distribution. Hodges, however, says it is most likely the sharing of material things referred to later in this chapter. “The apostolic fellowship was constituted on the basis of the apostolic teaching” (Bruce). People must know something before they can have fellowship (Hodges).

When you and I became Christians, three relationships changed. Jesus became our Savior. God became our Father. The Church became our family. In other words, believers are now my brothers and sisters in Christ. A New Testament church consists of baptized believers who continue to fellowship with one another. Barclay says, “Nelson explained one of his greatest

victories by saying, ‘I had the happiness to command a band of brothers.’ The church is only a real church when it is a band of brothers.”

The Lord’s Supper They steadfastly broke bread together. Jewish bread was baked in cakes and divided for distribution by breaking. The Jewish meal began with the father breaking a piece of bread and saying the blessing (Rackham). The initial act, breaking bread, represents the meal itself (synecdoche, Hodges). Here, breaking bread might refer to a meal, the Lord’s Supper, or both (Alexander). Most take it as a reference to both (Rackham; Bruce; Marshall; Wiersbe; Hodges). Later, this combination of a common meal and communion was called a love feast. The Council of Trullan (692 AD) forbade an agape from being held in a church (Rackham). A New Testament consists of baptized believers observing the Lord’s Table.

Prayer They prayed together. This refers to their appointed seasons of united prayer (Bruce). Their prayer flowed out of the first three items on this list: teaching, fellowship, and breaking bread (Hodges). A New Testament church consists of baptized believers praying together.

When I became the pastor of the Lindley Church, based on this passage, I began a Sunday potluck, a Wednesday prayer meeting, and a monthly get-together just to get together.

In July 2002, nine miners were trapped 240 feet underground in a water-filled coal mine shaft in Pennsylvania. The 55-degree water threatened to kill them slowly by hypothermia. They “decided early on they were either going to live or die as a group.” According to one news report, “When one would get cold, the other eight would huddle around the person and warm that person, and when another person got cold, the favor was returned.” They were trapped for three days. Harry B. Mayhugh, one of the miners, said, “Everybody had strong moments, but any certain time one guy got down, the rest pulled together. And then that guy would get back up, and maybe someone else would feel a little weaker, but it was a team effort. That’s the only way it could have been.”

The Result “Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles” (2:43). As a result of their commitment to the community, several things happened.

1. Awe. The fear mentioned here was awe, not alarm or dread of injury (Alexander). They were filled with a sense of awe (Bruce). In the meantime, the apostles performed many wonders and signs.

2. Giving. “Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need” (2:44-45). These first “Christians” are described as believers; they were believers in Jesus as the Messiah (Alexander). Their unity and affection were such that they seemed to constitute a single household (Alexander). The word “together” does not mean “in one place,” which would have been impossible. It means they were unified in heart and purpose (1:15; 2:1; Alexander).

They sold their goods and possessions. The Greek word translated “possessions” means “substance, property,” and the one rendered “goods” means “possession, property.” Rackham says that the first word refers to lands and property and the second to furniture and valuables. According to Alexander, the two words are “substantially equivalent.” They are put together to express the idea of wealth more fully. Whatever they sold did not include their houses, which is obvious from the fact that the next verse says that they broke bread from house to house (2:46). This is not a description of communism, which is government-enforced. This was strictly voluntary (Marshall). Acts 4:34 relates a similar response, but as Wiersbe says, the pattern of giving today is not Acts 4:34 but Acts 11:29.

“You just have to love children. They are the most adaptive creatures on earth. It’s funny to watch two friends play soccer and you notice their feet. “Their feet,” you say. You notice that they are wearing only one soccer shoe as they play. One because the buddy is wearing the other. The perfect example of sharing. I wonder if they feel stronger on the soccer shoe-clad foot. The boys share whatever they have with their friends so that they all may have fun. The poverty is incredible and a simple notebook is almost unheard of. And, of course, you can guess, if one has a notebook, what does he do? He tears it apart so his friends can have some paper too” (David Schlichter, Baghdad, Iraq, 12/15/06).

3. Unity, Joy, and Praise. “So, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God” (2:46-47a). At this point, Luke describes their daily habits. They met daily in the Temple and their meetings were characterized by unity. They met in Solomon’s colonnade, running along the east side of the outer court (Bruce), where the apostles taught (Rackham). They broke bread together in their homes. Evidently, they gathered in homes every evening for the love feast (Rackham; see also Marshall; Hodges). They eat together. Eating together creates a bond. The Jews would not eat with Gentiles who, in their opinion, were out of the covenant. A common meal is a manifestation of friendship and goodwill (Rackham). These meals were characterized by gladness, simplicity of heart (Eph. 6:5; Col. 3:22), and praise.

A New Testament church is a praising church (breaking bread and praying). Marshall observes that praise here is one of a few references in Acts to worship. “The fewness of such phrases reminds us that according to the New Testament, Christian gatherings were for instruction, fellowship, and prayer; in other words, for the benefit of the people taking part; there is less mention of the worship of God, although, of course, this element was not absent. A final comment notes that the evangelistic activity the church continued daily.”

4. Favor. “And having favor with all the people” (2:4:7b). Because of how they conducted themselves, they found favor with the general population.

5. Evangelism. “And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved” (2:47c). It was not just their lifestyle that impacted people for Christ; the Lord added to their number. Alexander points out that the sudden change from “God” (“praising God” in 2:47a) to “Lord” was intended by Luke to describe the Head of the church as personally adding to its number. This is the first time believers are called “the church.” The phrase “being saved” is a description of the same class called “believers” in Acts 2:44 (Alexander). They were being saved from God’s judgment for rejecting the Messiah (Marshall). Hodges takes the salvation in Acts 2 to be from the eschatological wrath of the day of the Lord.

They shared their goods with one another and the gospel with the world. As the church was unified, it multiplied.

Summary: A New Testament church is a community of baptized believers who are committed to personal growth, each other, and the Lord.

How would you like to have unity (a sense of belonging), joy, and gratitude? That is what the early church had, and the way that they got it was that the church was a way of life for them (Rackham). It was a daily routine, not a weekly routine. They met daily (2:46), cared daily (2:44-45; 6:1), witnessed daily (2:47), and as they did, they increased in number.

As a seminary student drove to church, the rain became harder and harder until it was almost a downpour. Then he passed someone walking on the sidewalk. He pulled the car over to the curb and motioned to the pedestrian to get in the car. The pedestrian came over, opened the door,

and got in. It turned out that the person walking that rainy morning was Professor Jones, an older, dignified gentleman who taught theology at the seminary. Professor Jones was close to retirement. The student had taken several classes from him. The student said, "Professor Jones, what are you doing out on a day like this?" Professor Jones replied, "Well, it's Sunday and I'm on my way to church." The student said, "Professor, didn't you see the weather report? Didn't you know that they had predicted rain for today? Why did you decide today to go to church?" Professor Jones replied, "I didn't decide today to attend church. I made that decision over 50 years ago when I became a Christian. I promised the Lord I would study His Word. I also promised to do my best to follow His Word and that I would be around His people every chance I got. No, I didn't decide today to go to church; I made that decision long ago." He was willing to walk to church in the pouring rain because he was committed to the Lord and fellowship with God's family, the church.

THE MISSING LINK

Someone has said, “The Bible is a disturbing book. Every time I read it, it disturbs how I think and/or live.” I have had that experience often. I had it last Sunday.

Let’s review. In the Great Commission (Mt. 28:19-20), the Lord told the apostles what to do, namely, preach the Gospel, baptize, and teach. The church was born on the day of Pentecost. The newborn church did exactly what the Lord told them to do; they preached the Gospel, baptized, and taught. The record in Acts goes a bit further and into more detail. It says that after Peter preached the gospel, those who believed were baptized. They continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine, in fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayers (2:42). Perhaps that is implied in the Great Commission. It is more detailed than the Lord’s words in Matthew 28.

Nothing is necessarily disturbing about what is said in Acts 2:42. It simply states that what the Lord wanted the church to do is what the church did beginning the day it was born. In speaking on the passage, I concluded, “A New Testament church is a community of baptized believers who are committed to personal growth, each other, and the Lord.” So what is so disturbing about all of that?

Prayer is Missing

What We Do The disturbing part is not understanding what they did. It is using the Scripture to measure how we do. In my opinion, all churches should measure themselves by Acts 2:42. We and every other church should ask: “Do we teach the Word of God? Do we fellowship with one another? Do we pray together?” Every church, including ours, could look at the list and say, “We basically do those things.” As a church, we provide a time for teaching, a time for baptism when needed, a time for the Lord’s Table, and a time for fellowship and prayer. So what’s disturbing?

We could do Better As I look at the passage and apply it to us, I think, “We could do better.” Are we doing those things as well as we could? I suspect all pastors, including me, would say we could do better.

The Problem What disturbed me was the results they got compared to our results. They did those things, and the Lord added to the church daily (2:47). People were saved every day! For us, something is missing. We don’t see people get saved. Some churches do not see people saved every year! What is the missing link?

Possibilities As I look at this passage, I see several things that could be called the missing link. They had “all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need” (2:44-45). They were *really* committed. Are we as committed to the Lord and one another as we should be? They continued “daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house” (2:46a). They had constant contact. Are we as connected as we should be? Furthermore, “they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God” (2:46b-47). They were continually rejoicing and praising God. Are we continually rejoicing and praising God as we should?

Prayer No doubt, we could improve in all of these areas, but I would like to suggest that the missing link between what they did and the results they got, as compared to what we do and what we get, begins with prayer. They continued steadfastly in prayer (2:42) and the Lord added

to the church daily (2:47). Surely, prayer is a link in that chain and for us, it is missing. I am not suggesting we don't pray. I am suggesting they prayed as a group; they were united in prayer.

Prayer is the Means

The Reprimand In Acts 4, the religious leaders were greatly disturbed that Peter and John preached the resurrection of Jesus (4:1-2). The religious leaders arrested them (Acts 4:3) and told them "not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus" (4:18).

The Reply Peter and John replied, "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (4:20).

The Report Then, they reported "to their own *companions* and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them" (4:23). Being released from prison, Peter and John returned to "their own" and reported what the religious leaders told them. Rackham says the expression "their own" refers to the apostles. Bruce says it includes their fellow apostles and other believers. Marshall suggested it was a close circle of friends and supporters, obviously a smaller group than the whole community mentioned in Acts 4:4.

The Response "So, when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: "Lord, You *are* God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them" (4:24). The explanation of "they raise their voices to God with one accord" is either one person spoke, but the whole congregation was unified in what was said or all prayed aloud and Luke does not record the exact words of any one individual. The most likely explanation is that one spoke for the whole company (Marshall).

Their prayer quotes Psalm 2:1-2 (4:25-26), which they apply to those who crucified Jesus (4:27-28). Then, they petition the Lord to look at their situation (4:29). They request that they be granted boldness to speak God's Word. They desired the courage to proclaim the gospel without fear or favor (Bruce). They also asked that more miracles be done in the name of Jesus (4:30). They did not ask for protection. They sought God for power.

The Result As a result of their prayer, the place was shaken "and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness" (4:31b). The filling of the Spirit resulted in boldness. They spoke God's message with boldness. The Greek word translated "boldness" means "freedom of speech, plainness, openness, confidence, boldness.

Prayer is the means to God working. A. C. Dixon said, "When we rely upon organization, we get what organization can do; when we rely upon education, we get what education can do; when we rely upon eloquence, we get what eloquence can do, and so on. Nor am I disposed to undervalue any of these things in their proper place, but when we rely upon prayer, we get what God can do."

Prayer is the Means to God Working

Opportunity, No less than Paul, felt people needed to pray for him. He requested people pray that he would have an opportunity to witness. He says, "Meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains" (Col. 4:3). The word "us" indicates that Paul was requesting prayer for himself, Timothy, and Epaphras. The phrase "open to us a door" means "to give us an opportunity." Prayer does not open doors, but a God who answers prayer does.

Paul desired an opportunity to speak the Word. That includes preaching the gospel (Lightfoot), but it is more. The “Word” is further defined as “the mystery of Christ,” which has been revealed about Christ. Earlier in the book, he spoke of the mystery God wanted him to make known, and he described it as “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27). In the book of Ephesians, which elaborates on this mystery, even further, Paul defines it as Jews and Gentiles being members of the same body.

Openness Paul’s second prayer request was “that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak” (4:4). Opportunity was his immediate purpose; boldness was his ultimate purpose. It is one thing for God to open a door; it is another for the believer to enter it. When I am with people who need the Lord, I ask the Lord for an opening.

Summary: The missing link between just doing church and seeing God bless a church begins with prayer.

Dr. Stephen Goold, the Crystal Evangelical Free Church pastor in Minneapolis, Minnesota, was asked to speak on prayer at the Billy Graham School of Evangelism. He said that December 5, 1994 was a significant day in his life because that night, he heard a story from Doug Coe that gave him a completely new understanding of what it means to pray.

That night Doug Coe told a story about his friend Bob Hunter. Bob was a new Christian, searching to understand what it all meant. One day, he asked Doug, his good friend: “Doug, do you really believe what the Bible says about moving mountains when we pray?” Doug thought about it and answered, “Sure.” Bob was rather incredulous and asked him, “Do you mean to say you believe that if I prayed for a mountain to move, that it would move?” Doug thought for a while and the conversation went something like this: “Let me put it this way. I not only believe it, but I’ll make you a bet. A \$500 bet. Bob, what do you know about Africa?”

“Nothing.”

“What do you think about when you think of Africa?”

“I think about monkeys swinging from trees.”

“Then here’s the bet. I want you to pray for 45 days, ‘God help Africa.’ You can’t miss a single day. And that’s all you have to pray, ‘God help Africa.’ At the end of 45 days, you be the judge of whether any mountains have moved. If you think a mountain has moved, you pay me \$500. If you don’t think a mountain has moved, you just tell me, and I’ll pay you \$500, no questions asked.”

Bob, being an astute businessman, rather liked the odds. He accepted the bet. He began to pray daily, saying, “God help Africa.”

Just a few days later, he was at a dinner and sat next to an elderly lady. In the course of the conversation, he found out she lived in Uganda and ran an orphanage there. He began asking her some questions about Uganda and Africa. After a while, she finally asked him why he was so interested in Africa. To which he responded, with some embarrassment, “You’ll never believe this, but I made a bet with a good friend,” and proceeded to tell her about his bet with Doug Coe. By the end of the evening, she invited him to return to Uganda with her in a few days to visit the orphanage. He accepted the invitation.

You can guess that when he visited the orphanage in Uganda, his heart was touched by the orphans. After returning to the U. S., he got a few friends together, bought a load of toys and clothes, and sent them to Uganda.

The following week, he got a phone call from the woman at the orphanage: “Mr. Hunter, the children are so grateful for what you did. They would love it if you could come again so they can

give you a special presentation to show you their appreciation. Can you come?" He accepted the invitation and was off to Uganda again.

After a very heartwarming ceremony at the orphanage, there was a phone call for Bob from the President of Uganda. He had heard about the gifts and called to thank him personally and on behalf of his country for what Bob had done for the orphans. He also invited Bob to visit him that afternoon.

When Bob arrived that afternoon for his appointment, the President was just in the middle of rushing out of his office. He apologized for having to go off to some appointments but invited Bob to come along to get acquainted in the car. Bob accepted. Along the way, at one of the stops, Bob looked out the window to see what appeared to be a stockyard; only this was a stockyard not filled with cattle but with men. Bob asked the President what he was seeing. The President responded that it was a political prison, and those men were his political enemies. The conversation went something like this:

"But, Mr. President, that's not right to have men living in such horrible conditions. You must let them go."

"But those are my political enemies, men who have tried to subvert my authority. I cannot let them go. That would be foolish."

"You have to let them go; it's just not right that human beings would have to live in those conditions."

The conversation did not last long, and shortly thereafter, Bob was back home in the U. S. About a week after getting back, he received a phone call. This time, it was the State Department asking him to come to a meeting with the Undersecretary for African Affairs and Bob had a conversation along these lines:

"Mr. Hunter, on behalf of the Government of the United States, I want to thank you for what you have done in Uganda."

"What? Is the U.S. Government thanking me for sending some toys to some orphans in Uganda?"

"No, Mr. Hunter. It is about political prisoners."

"What about the political prisoners?"

"The President of Uganda recently released the political prisoners, which is something our government has been trying to get him to do for years without success. After taking this action, he told us that he was doing it because of what you said to him."

"What I said to him?"

"Yes. What exactly did you say to him?"

Needless to say, Bob Hunter was flabbergasted. But the story doesn't end there. After the State Department meeting, the President of Uganda called Bob over the phone and asked him to return to Uganda to help him form a new Cabinet for his country.

"But Mr. President, I don't know anything about your country or the people who would best serve in your government. I'm just an American businessman. How can I possibly help you choose a cabinet?"

Bob went and did what he could to help the President select his new ministers. Since that time, a close friendship has developed between Bob Hunter, an American businessman, and the President of Uganda. The President even stays in Bob's home in the DC area when he visits the U. S.

And you can guess, after those 45 days of praying, "God help Africa," Bob Hunter sent Doug Coe a check for \$500.

That night in Gig Harbor, Doug Coe proceeded to tell us that he told his story later to a group of around twenty very successful business executives, all members of the Young Presidents Organization, an international association of business people who have become the chief executives or owners of companies above a certain size by age 40.

After those 45 days, Doug received 12 checks for \$500 each. A while later, he received the 13th check, accompanied by a letter that said something like this:

“Doug, my mountain did not move. But the discipline of praying every day for 45 days has changed my life, and so I feel I owe you this \$500.”

I was moved by that story. I began praying that night. Toward the end of the 45 days, I eagerly watched to see if the mountain was moving. It did not. But I heard some deep rumblings, turned around, and saw that a different mountain had moved from the one I had prayed for. But a mountain nevertheless. And the discipline of praying every day in that way changed me too. I woke up, and still wake up every morning, and the first thing on my mind is prayer.

What are the mountains of your life? What are those unmovable things you would never believe could change in your life? What is there around you in your world that desperately needs God to intervene in mountain-moving fashion?

Praying for 45 days is not a formula. It is the beginning of a discipline and an exercise in faith that can change our lives. There is no bargaining with God involved here; there is no “deal” whereby if we pray for 45 days for whatever we want, He will give it to us. But if you think you want to embark on this faith journey, let me offer you some suggestions:

Pray to move a mountain. God would be pleased to move it for you because it is also on His heart.

Pray that the mountain moves; don’t tell God how to move the mountain.

Make sure it is a mountain you pray to move, not a molehill.

When you pray for a mountain to move, don’t be surprised that the mountain that actually moves is different.

And remember the line from the C.S. Lewis character in the stage play and movie *Shadowlands*: “Prayer doesn’t change God. It changes me.”

(Stephen Goold, “The Impact of Prayer,” Crystal Evangelical Free Church, Minneapolis, Minnesota)

SILVER AND GOLD HAVE I NONE, BUT...

Money is always a problem. As the saying goes, “There is more month than money.” That is true for most people personally and for most churches. Consequently, usually out of necessity, we focus on money.

A pastor, who usually did not preach or say much about money, said to me, “I am preaching a series of sermons all this month on stewardship.” He explained that three families, all large givers, had moved out of state. The church was hurting financially and he had no choice but to preach on giving. That is not unusual. Many, if not most, pastors in America do an annual series of messages on giving.

There is nothing wrong with preaching about giving. The Scripture certainly has a lot to say on that subject. At the same time, that can become the focus to such an extent that what should be in focus is out of focus. What should be the focus?

The Request

The Apostles “Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour” (3:1). While Peter was the spokesman, Peter and John were closely connected. They were partners in the fishing business (Lk. 5:10). Jesus sent them to prepare for the Passover (Lk. 22:8). Mary Magdalene reported the resurrection to them (Jn. 20:1-2). They were together after the resurrection (Jn. 21:7). They are together, going to the Temple to pray. Do you have a spiritual buddy?

The Jews prayed three times a day, at 9 am, noon, and 3 pm (Barclay). The ninth hour, three o’clock in the afternoon, was the third hour of prayer, probably the hour of the evening sacrifice (Alexander), which was accompanied by a prayer by the congregation (Marshall). Notice that the apostles still follow the customs of Judaism.

The Lame Man “And a certain man lame from his mother’s womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms from those who entered the temple” (3:2). As Peter and John entered the Temple gate called “Beautiful,” they encountered a man who had been lame from birth. Since, in the Jewish religion, giving alms was a particularly meritorious act, it was appropriate for a beggar to station himself where pious people might be expected to pass by on their way to worship (Marshall). Today, homeless people seek out a church. The Beautiful gate is usually identified as the one described by Josephus as being covered in Corinthian brass (Alexander; Bruce).

The Request “Who, seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked for alms” (3:3). The friends of the lame man carried him to the Temple gate every day so that he could ask for alms. Hence, when Peter and John passed by, he asked them for financial help.

The Response

The Look “And fixing his eyes on him, with John, Peter said, ‘Look at us’” (3:4). When Peter and John heard the lame man speak (3:3), they fixed their eyes on him. The Greek word translated “fixing” means “to look fixingly, gaze.” They both gazed at the lame man, but Peter

was the one who spoke, requesting that the lame man look at them. Eye contact is something we sometimes use to avoid having contact. It is used to ignore people. We look the other way. One of the ways to get past a homeless person is to avoid eye contact. It does not work with all homeless people, but it is one technique we use that works sometimes. All females know that to not look at a male is to send a message that you're not interested. Eye contact makes contact. It shows respect. It is a means of intimacy. Eye contact can be more intimate than a handshake or even a hug. One of the things that homeless people, and for that matter, everyone, needs is respect. Right eye contact communicates respect. Of course, eye contact with a frown communicates disapproval, but with the right expression, it communicates respect.

“So, he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them” (3:5). Expecting to receive money from them, the lame man gave Peter and John his undivided attention.

The Speech **“Then Peter said, ‘Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk’” (3:6).** Peter told the lame man that he did not have any money to give him. Peter had probably given the church all his money (2:44-45). Besides, that is not what the man needed most. Peter did not have the money to give, but he did have something to offer—healing. The expression “in the name of” means “by the authority of, as His representative” (Alexander). “He needed salvation for his soul and healing for his body, and money could provide neither” (Wiersbe). Money was a temporary fix that could not solve his deepest need.

The Healing **“And he took him by the right hand and lifted *him* up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. So, he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them; walking, leaping, and praising God” (3:7-8).** Peter took the lame man by the hand and lifted him up. The lame man exercised faith (3:16). The healing was instantaneous. Receiving strength in his feet and ankles, the man, lame from birth, leaped up, stood, and walked for the first time in his life. It has been suggested that he first practiced standing and when he found that he could do that, he tried walking. When he found he could do that, he bounded along, leaping in the air (Bruce). Isaiah says, “Then the lame shall leap like a deer” (Isa. 35:6). He walked into the Temple with them. No, they walked; he walked and leaped, praising God. He entered the Court of the Women (Rackham; Bruce) to thank God in public worship.

The book of Acts is about Jesus continuing to work by the Spirit through the apostles. Here, Peter is able to do the same kind of miracle Jesus did, acting in the name of Jesus, thus continuing the ministry of Jesus (Marshall). By healing in the name of Jesus, it is evident that Jesus was now working through the apostles (Constable). Paul worked a similar miracle at Lystra (14:8-18).

The Reaction

They Saw **“And all the people saw him walking and praising God” (3:9).** This miracle was not done in secret; it was done in the open (Alexander). It was not done in the corner but in the Temple in the presence of all the people who saw what happened.

They Marvelled **“Then they knew that it was he who sat begging alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him” (3:10).** The people who saw what happened knew this man was the beggar at the gate of the Temple. They knew he had been lame for years. Consequently, they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened.

Summary: The church should focus on ministry, not money.

Counting out a large sum of money, Pope Innocent II said to Thomas Aquinas, “You see, Thomas, the church can no longer say, ‘Silver and gold have I none.’” To which Thomas replied, “True, holy Father, neither can she say, ‘Rise and walk.’”

We can minister to people’s physical needs. Since the gift of healing has ceased, I am skeptical of faith healers, but that is not to say that God does not heal in answer to prayer. We can pray for people to be healed and minister to them in various ways to meet their physical needs. Before this lame man was healed, people carried him to the Temple and they did it daily (3:2).

We can minister to people’s spiritual needs, such as salvation. This healing is an illustration of salvation. He was born unable to walk in such a way as to please God. He was poor, as sinners are bankrupt before God and unable to pay the Spiritual debt owed to Him. He was outside the Temple, as sinners are separated from God. He was healed solely by grace and the healing was immediate (Wiersbe).

On November 28, 2008, there was a gun battle—in Palm Desert—in a Toys R Us store. Two women began arguing. As they swung at each other, the two men with them started to argue. One flashed a gun. The other man pulled out a gun, began chasing the first man down the aisle and started firing. As bullets flew, one woman in the store hid behind a pile of DVDs. Terrified that she was going to die, she began to recite the Lord’s Prayer. She said, “If I’m going to die, I need to make peace.” (*Los Angeles Times*, 11/29/2008, p. 1). The two men killed each other. That is tragic. A Lady did not know how to make peace with God. That is tragic. People need to know the Lord.

Curt Whitehall passed away recently. We had the memorial service yesterday. A lot of people said a lot of nice things about Curt. I suggested that the greatest thing that could be said about him (or anyone) is that he was a servant. He served in many different ways: usher, exterminator, cook, babysitter, etc., without ever complaining and without needing applause. We may not have silver or gold, but we can be as good as gold by spending our lives serving the Lord by serving others.

THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

Have you ever done something you wish you had not done? Have you ever committed a sin you wish could be taken off the record? Christianity teaches that God forgives sin. How good is the forgiveness? What if it was a big sin? Is there some way to have sin obliterated from the record?

We Did Not Heal Him

The People's Amazement "Now as the lame man who was healed held on to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the porch which is called Solomon's, greatly amazed" (3:11). As Peter and John were going to the Temple to pray, Peter healed a lame man, who followed them into the Temple (3:1-10). The curious crowd gathered around Peter and John in Solomon's Porch. From the southern or western side of the city, when people entered the gate of the Temple, they found themselves in a vast court, a square of 600, or possibly even 1000 feet, called the Court of the Gentiles. It was surrounded by cloisters or porticoes formed by double rows of columns. On the east side was Solomon's Porch, a portico, so-called because it rested on Solomon's foundations (Rackham). The people who saw the miracle of healing were "awestruck" (Alexander), like a small boy watching a magician pull a rabbit from a hat.

Peter's Admission "So when Peter saw it, he responded to the people: 'Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Or why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?'" (3:12). As he did in his sermon on the day of Pentecost, Peter began with what they were thinking. He asked why they were marveling at the healing of the lame man as if he and John did it by their power or godliness. Extraordinary piety was associated with divine favor (Alexander). Peter's point is that he and John did not heal this man. They did not possess this remarkable power on their own, nor were they so devoted to God that He responded to their prayers (Marshall). Paul and Barnabas faced a similar situation (14:8-18).

We are to esteem those in the ministry but not go too far. Paul says, "We urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake" (1 Thess. 5:12-13). He also says, "For when one says, 'I am of Paul,' and another, 'I am of Apollos,' are you not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase" (1 Cor. 4:4-7).

Jesus Healed Him

They Delivered Jesus "The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go" (3:13). The next point Peter makes is that Jesus healed the man. God did this through Jesus (Rackham; Bruce). Peter does not explicitly state this until later (Marshall).

Peter begins by saying that God glorified Jesus. God is identified as the God of our fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Jesus is identified as God's Servant. Peter uses language from Isaiah (Isa. 52:13-53:12). Like Isaiah, Peter begins speaking of the Servant being exalted. Then speaks of His suffering (Isa. 52:13; Bruce; Marshall). God glorified His Servant Jesus by healing the lame man through His name (3:16). God glorified Jesus; they denied Him and delivered Him to Pilate, who had determined that He was innocent. The gross injustice to an innocent man was aggravated by the fact that they rejected their God's Servant and delivered Him to a heathen ruler (Alexander).

They Denied Jesus "But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you" (3:14). The One they denied is the Holy One, possibly a Messianic title (Marshall; Constable), and The Just One; they ask for a murderer to be released, rather than the holy and just Jesus. They denied the innocent and chose the guilty. They demanded the condemnation of the innocent and the acquittal of the guilty. They rejected the Messiah and preferred a murderer! (Alexander).

They Killed Jesus "And killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses" (3:15). They killed the Prince of life, the One God raised from the dead. They killed Him; God raised Him. "Calvary may have been man's last word, but the empty tomb was God's last Word" (Wiersbe). The Greek word translated "Prince" means "founder, author, prince, leader" (5:31; Heb. 2:10; 12:2). Peter testifies that He and John are witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus.

Someone has written, "The Greatest Man in History had no servants, yet they called Him Master. Had no degree, yet they called Him Teacher. Had no medicines, yet they called Him Healer. He had no army, yet kings feared Him. He won no military battles, yet He conquered the world. He committed no crime, yet they crucified Him. He was buried in a tomb, yet He lives."

The people to whom Peter was speaking committed an unthinkable sin. They killed the Messiah!

Jesus Healed the Lame Man "And His name, through faith in His name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. Yes, the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all" (3:16). The lame man was healed in the name of Jesus, that is, by faith in the name of Jesus the weak, lame man was made strong and perfectly healthy (Bruce). The faith was exercised by the man himself (Alexander) and/or the apostles (Mt. 17:20).

Peter's point is that God glorified Jesus (3:13). From His place of exultation, Jesus endowed the disciples with the power to act in His name (Bruce). The whole point of the book of Acts is that Jesus is working by the Holy Spirit through the apostles.

Jesus is the Messiah. Therefore repent

Jesus is the Messiah "Yet now, brethren, I know that you did it in ignorance, as did also your rulers" (3:17). Peter concedes that they killed Jesus out of ignorance. Ignorance does not eliminate guilt. As the old adage goes, "Ignorance of the law excuses none."

"But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled" (3:18). Even though they killed Jesus, it was predicted by the Old Testament prophets that the Messiah would suffer and be raised from the dead. Jesus fulfilled all those prophecies (Ps. 22; 69; Isa. 53; Dan. 9:26; Zach. 13:7).

Repent “Repent therefore and be converted” (3:19a). Peter concludes that they should repent and be converted. The Greek word translated “repent” means “to change one’s mind.” They were to change their mind concerning Jesus. “All they had to do to avail themselves of this salvation was to change their former attitude of Jesus and bring it into line with God’s attitude. God had clearly declared his verdict by raising him from the dead” (Bruce).

The Greek word rendered “converted” means “to turn” and is used figuratively of “turning to God” (A-S). In Acts 26:20, this same Greek word is used and “to God” is added, indicating that the turning is to God. In the book of Acts (and elsewhere), when “turning” is used of salvation, it means turning to the Lord, which is the same as trusting Christ. In Acts 9, Peter healed a man and all who saw it “turned to the Lord” (Acts 9:35), but a little later in the passage, Luke’s comment on that event is that “many believed in the Lord” (Acts 9:42).

Note there is no reference to baptism.

The Results “that your sins may be blotted out” (3:19b). The result of changing their minds and trusting the Lord is their sins may be blotted out. Instead of speaking of the remission of sins (2:38), Peter uses the stronger figure of the obliteration of their sins (Alexander). Barclay points out that the Greek word translated “blotted out” is a vivid word. Ancient ink contained no acid. Therefore, it did not bite into the papyrus as modern ink does; it simply laid upon the surface of the page. One only needs to wipe a wet sponge across the page to erase the writing.

They should also change their minds about Jesus and trust the Lord “so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord” (3:19c). To interpret the phrase “the times of refreshing” as relief from the sense of guilt and God’s displeasure is excluded by the promise of Christ coming in the next verse (Alexander). It refers to the times of the Messiah (Alexander) and, ultimately, the realization of the Messianic kingdom (Rackham).

Moreover, they should change their minds about Jesus and trust the Lord so that God will send Jesus. “And that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began” (3:20-21). God sending Jesus does not refer to sending Jesus into the hearts of individuals. It refers to the visible, literal return of Jesus Christ into the world (Alexander). This Jesus is the One who had preached to them and the One who ascended into heaven and will remain there until the restoration spoken by the prophets. Rackham says, “An essential condition of the restoration was their own repentance. This idea was familiar to his hearers, for the rabbis taught that ‘If all Israel together repented for a single day, redemption through the Messiah would come.’”

Some Dispensationalists teach that Peter is here offering the kingdom to Israel and if the nation of Israel repented, Jesus would have returned and set up the kingdom. For example, Toussaint argues that is the case because 1) There are two purpose clauses, one in Acts 3:19 and one in Acts 3:20. According to him, the one in verse 19 is a near purpose and the one in verse 20 is a more remote purpose. Thus, repentance would result in the forgiveness of sins (the near purpose) and if Israel as a whole repented, the coming of the kingdom at the second coming of Christ would be fulfilled (the more remote goal). 2) The word “restore” (3:21) is related to the word “restore” in Acts 1:6 (one is a noun and the other is a verb). Both anticipate the restoration of the kingdom to Israel (Mt. 17:11; Mk 9:12). Furthermore, the concept of restoration parallels regeneration when it is used of the kingdom (Isa. 65:17; 66:22; Mt. 19:28; Rom. 8:20–22). 3) The sending of Christ, that is, the Messiah means the coming of the kingdom. 4) The Old Testament “foretold these days,” that is, the prophets often spoke of the messianic golden age,

that is, the Millennium (Toussaint, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, vol. II, p. 361; Hodges also takes this view).

Other Dispensationalists do not believe that this was a reoffer of the kingdom. Pentecost says this is not a reoffer. Instead, Peter was telling the nation what they must do to enter into the benefits of the kingdom. He says, “The time ‘for God to restore everything,’ to which Peter refers in Acts 3:21, is the same restoration referred to in 1:6. Therefore, this statement does not constitute a reoffer of the kingdom since the necessary prerequisites are not at hand. Jesus Christ is not personally present and offering Himself to the nation. Only He could make a genuine offer of the kingdom” (Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come*, pp. 275-76, cited by Constable, who takes the same position).

Jesus is the Messiah “For Moses truly said to the fathers, ‘The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear in all things, whatever He says to you.’ And it shall be *that every soul who will not hear that Prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people*” (3:22-23). Peter appeals to the Old Testament to prove that Jesus is the Messiah. This is his third argument from the Old Testament to prove the Messiahship of Jesus (2:16, 25, 34). This time he quotes Deuteronomy 18:15-19. Interestingly, this prophecy was never understood to be fulfilled by any prophet in the Old Testament (Alexander). When John the Baptist came, he was asked if he was the Messiah, Elijah, or the prophet (Jn. 1:21, 25). Peter reminds them that those who refuse to hear that Prophet will be judged.

“Yes, and all the prophets, from Samuel and those who follow, as many as have spoken, have also foretold these days” (3:24). Moses was not alone in predicting the coming of the Messiah. Samuel is mentioned next because he was the next great prophet after Moses (Ps. 99:6; Alexander; see 2 Sam. 7:16).

“You are sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed’” (3:25). Peter concludes his sermon by reminding them that they all are, indeed, “Men of Israel” (3:12). God made a covenant with “our” Father Abraham to the effect that all the families of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; Gal. 3:8). The “seed” is a reference to Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:16). The word “families” is a reference to both Jews and Gentiles (Marshall). The blessing is the forgiveness of sins (3:26).

“To you first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities” (3:26). The covenant specifically specified that “all the families of the earth” would be blessed, but it was to Israel first (Rom. 1:16; 2:9, 10). The blessing includes the forgiveness of sins. This is designed “to preclude the favorite and fatal Jewish error, that the patriarchal promises and covenants would be fulfilled in Abraham’s descendants, irrespective of their personal repentance and conversion” (Alexander).

Summary: Even if your sins are as great as crucifying Christ, if you change your mind about Him and trust Him, your sins will be blotted out.

The Lord wants to forgive you. For that to happen, you need to recognize that you need forgiveness. After a Sunday school teacher concluded her lesson, she wanted to make sure she had made her point. She said, “Can anyone tell me what you must do before you can obtain forgiveness of sin?” There was a short pause. From the back of the room, a small boy spoke up. “Sin,” he said. True. Then, you have to recognize that Christ paid for sin and trust Him for forgiveness of sins. Believers are forgiven (the book of Acts), declared righteous (the book of Romans), and regenerated (the Gospel of John).

The Lord wants you to forgive others. Paul said, “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you” (Eph. 4:32). As the story goes, old Joe was dying. For years, he had been at odds with Bill, formerly one of his best friends. Wanting to straighten things out, he sent word for Bill to come and see him. When Bill arrives, Joe tells him that he is afraid to go into eternity because of their bad feelings. Then, very reluctantly and with great effort, Joe apologized for things he had said and done. He also assured Bill that he forgave him for his offenses. Everything seemed fine until Bill turned to go. As he walked out of the room, Joe called out after him, “But, remember, if I get better, this doesn’t count!” The Lord wants you to forgive others genuinely.

We are to forgive others as God has forgiven us. In the Old Testament, God said, “I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins” (Isa. 43:25). Clara Barton, the founder of the American Red Cross, was reminded one day of a vicious deed that someone had done to her years before. But she acted as if she had never even heard of the incident. “Don’t you remember it?” her friend asked. “No,” came Barton’s reply, “I distinctly remember forgetting it.”

The Lord wants you to tell others about His forgiveness. People need the Lord. They need His love, His forgiveness, and His wisdom. Peter healed a lame man and used it as an excuse to talk about the forgiveness of sins. As someone has said, “He would use any lame excuse to preach the gospel.” When a stewardess asks a man on a plane if he wants a drink, he says, “I took a drink 20 years ago and I haven’t been thirsty since” (He was referring to Jn. 4:13-14). That example may be a bit much, but it illustrates the point.

Recently, a pastor friend of mine told me that a Muslim lady came to see him. She said she wanted to know more about Jesus. When he asked why she was so interested in Jesus, she said, “and I met a Christian lady who was kind to me and she said it was because of Jesus. So I thought I should find out more about Him.” We should use every lame excuse to do everything we can to be kind to people so that we can have an opportunity to tell them about the Lord.

THE LIMIT TO OBEDIENCE

The distress was written on her face. She was obviously feeling great pressure. Here's what she said to me. "I have a problem. The Bible tells me to submit to my husband. My husband is in the process of preparing our tax return, and I know he is not reporting all of our income. Because we are filing jointly, he's going to ask me to sign it. What shall I do? If I obey my husband, I am disobeying the law. If I disobey my husband, I am disobeying the Bible. That is a mild case as compared to some others. That kind of thing happens in marriage and at work. Is there a limit to obedience? The Bible says we are to obey the government. Is there a limit to obedience to the government? Is civil disobedience ever appropriate?"

The Incarceration

The Leaders "Now as they spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead" (4:1-2). As Peter and John (4:13) were teaching in the Temple, a crowd gathered, which attracted the attention of the captain of the Temple, the priest, and particularly the Sadducees. The captain of the Temple was the commander of the Temple police (Bruce; Marshall) and, therefore, was responsible for maintaining order in the Temple courts. The priests were, of course, the priests who served in the Temple. The Sadducees were priests and elders with a particular religious and political outlook. For example, they did not believe in a resurrection of the dead (23:8; Lk. 20:27-40).

These leaders were greatly disturbed. The Greek word translated "greatly disturbed" means "to be worn out, to be sorely troubled" (A-S), "worried, grieved" (Strong). They were weary, out of patience, and tired of hearing what the apostles were doing (Alexander). They were "very much annoyed" (Rackham).

The priests were bothered *that* the apostles were teaching and the Sadducees did not like *what* was being preached, namely, that through Jesus, there is a resurrection from the dead (Rackham). The apostles were teaching a rising, not from sleep or a sickbed, but from the dead (see Alexander).

The Arrest "And they laid hands on them, and put *them* in custody until the next day, for it was already evening" (4:3). Deciding that something had to be done, the religious leaders arrested Peter and John (see the arrest of Paul and 21:27-36). They had the right to arrest them because what they did might be regarded as a breach of the peace in the Temple precincts (Marshall). By that time, it was late in the day. Peter and John had come to the Temple at three in the afternoon (3:1), so it was early in the evening when they were arrested. Since it was late in the day, the religious leaders decided to hold them overnight. It was unlawful or inconvenient to assemble the Sanhedrin at night.

The Result "However, many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand" (4:4). The preachers were arrested, but the Word was not (2 Tim. 2:9). The term "word" is a reference to the gospel (Alexander). To have believed is to have "received it as true and trusted in the Savoir whom it offered" (Alexander). Counting those who believed on the day of Pentecost and those who believed after, the number came to 5000

(Alexander). If “men” is to be taken as males, the number is much higher (Mt. 14:21). This is the last specific number given for conversions in Acts. It has been suggested that this is an allusion to the miracle of feeding the 5000 (Lk. 9:14), indicating that Jesus, through the apostles, was spiritually feeding 5000 men (Hodges). Sometimes, there are negative consequences to obedience. Peter and John obey the Lord to preach the resurrection and they end up in jail. Your willingness to suffer the consequences reflects your commitment to the Lord.

The Interrogation

The Leaders “And it came to pass, on the next day, that their rulers, elders, and scribes as well as Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the family of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem” (4:5-6). The next day, the religious leaders assembled together to deal with the situation posed by Peter’s preaching. The rulers, elders, and scribes were the three groups that made up the Sanhedrin (Mk. 14:53, 55). The rulers were the chief priests who held various official positions in the administration of the Temple (Marshall). The elders were lay leaders of the community, the wealthy, the aristocratic class, the rich, and the influential (Barclay). They tended to be Sadducees (Marshall). The scribes were those who copied the Law. They tended to be Pharisees. Annas was high priest from AD 6 to 14 but was deposed by the Romans (the Jews still consider him the high priest). Caiaphas, the son-in-law of Annas, was the current high priest. John and Alexander are otherwise unknown. Based on the variant reading in the Greek manuscript D, John has been identified as Jonathan, another son of Annas (see Marshall).

The Question “And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, ‘By what power or by what name have you done this?’” (4:7). The leaders wanted to know by what power Peter and John had healed a man. A similar question had been asked of Jesus (Mt. 21:23). Their question seems to imply a suspicion of some occult and forbidden means of healing (Alexander). At any rate, it is, in effect, an invitation to explain to the authority which power enabled them to perform such a miracle (Marshall).

The Answer “Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, ‘Rulers of the people and elders of Israel’” (4:8). Being filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter addresses the Sanhedrin (Lk. 21:14-15). He addresses the whole body as rulers and elders (Alexander). Peter’s filling of the Holy Spirit fulfilled the promise of “inspiration” made by the Lord in Luke 12:11-12. This kind of filling is the sovereign act of the Holy Spirit by which men become His mouthpiece (Hodges). Nothing in this passage suggests that Peter was “out of fellowship” and when he returned to fellowship, he was filled with the Spirit of God. The book of Acts is about the Lord continuing His work through people by the Holy Spirit. This is another illustration.

“If we this day are judged for a good deed *done* to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well, let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole” (4:9-10). Peter answers their question by saying he and John (“we”) healed the lame man by the name of Jesus. The Greek word translated “well” is the one usually rendered “saved.” Here it denotes deliverance from bodily suffering (Alexander). The one rendered “whole” means “sound, whole, healthy.”

Peter does not stop with a simple answer to their question. He goes on to charge them with crucifying the Messiah, whom God raised from the dead. This is an exceedingly bold speech. He charges them with a crime and brings up the resurrection, which the Sadducees especially deny!

Furthermore, suppose the question of the Sanhedrin contains a reference to Deuteronomy 18, which talks about speaking in the name of God as opposed to other gods. In that case, Peter indirectly asserts the deity of Christ (Alexander). Peter once flinched before a maidservant. Now, he accuses the priest and the rulers of crucifying the Messiah.

“This is the ‘stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone’ (4:11). Without saying it is a quotation from Scripture, Peter cites Psalm 118:22 (Mt. 21:42; Mk, 12:10-11; Lk. 20:17; 1 Pet. 2:7). Psalm 118:22 says, “The stone *which* the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.” The stone tossed aside by the builders as worthless or unfit by the builders is afterward selected as the cornerstone, where the strength of the structure resides (Alexander; Marshall). The members of the Sanhedrin were the “builders” who had rejected God’s Stone (Wiersbe).

“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (4:12). Peter adds that not only did he and John heal the lame man in the name of Jesus, but there is also no other name by which people can be saved. Bruce suggests that the deliverance of the cripple from bodily affliction might serve as a parable for the deliverance from the guilt, the sin of the judgment to come (14:9). The point is that it was Jesus who “saved” the lame man and only Jesus can offer salvation in the fullest sense (Marshall). The physical healing is a symbol of spiritual salvation (Hodges; see his comments on this verse in his comments on 9:32-43).

John Wesley says he had a dream in which he appeared at the gate of hell. He cried out, “Are there any Presbyterians in there?” “Yes,” came the answer, “a great many.” “Any Church of England members?” “Yes, lots of them.” “Any Baptist?” “A large number.” “Are there any Wesleyans?” The answer came, “Yes, many of them.” Then, Wesley said he dreamed of standing at heaven’s gate. He repeated the same questions. Each time, they received the same answer, “No, not one!” No Presbyterians, no Baptists, no Church of England members, and no Wesleyans! “Who, then, is in heaven?” Wesley said he was told, “We know nothing here about the names you mentioned. The only name that matters here is Christian.”

The Injunction

They Marveled “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus” (4:13). The members of the Sanhedrin marveled at several things about Peter and John. They were unable to account for what they saw (Alexander). They saw that Peter and John were bold. The Greek word translated “saw” means “to look at, gaze, behold.” The one rendered “bold” means “freedom of speech, plainness, confidence, boldness.” It is having the courage to speak as opposed to hesitation and reserve (Alexander).

They perceived that Peter and John were uneducated and untrained. The Greek word translated “uneducated” means “without learning, unlettered.” The one rendered “untrained” means “a private person,” as opposed to an official, “one without professional knowledge, unskilled, uneducated, unlearned.” (This latter word is the Greek word from which we get the English word “idiot.”) The point is that they were without formal education and not religious professionals. Alexander says they were uneducated laymen and implied that they lacked experience as public speakers. They lacked “professional status” (Rackham). Today, we would say they were not seminary graduates, or were not ordained to the ministry. They had not

graduated from an approved seminary, nor did they have acceptable ministerial credentials. Peter and John encountered academic and professional snobbery (Barclay).

They realized that Peter and John had been with Jesus. Alexander suggests that they finally accounted for what seemed to them to be so unaccountable at first. The substance and spirit of Peter and John indicated they had been with Jesus, “whose extraordinary wisdom and authority in teaching could not be disputed, even by his enemies.”

Dr. Charles Weigle, the author of the famous hymn “No One Ever Cared For Me Like Jesus,” was participating in a Bible conference in Pasadena, California. One day he visited a rose garden. Later that day, when he returned to the conference, someone asked him how he enjoyed the rose garden. Surprised they knew where he had been, he asked what made them think he had been to a rose garden. The answer, of course, was that they could smell the fragrance of the roses on his clothes. As it is evident that someone has been to a rose garden, so it is evident that some have been with Jesus.

“And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it” (4:14). The members of the Sanhedrin not only marveled at Peter’s sermon, they could say nothing against what Peter and John were doing because the healed lame man was standing before them as evidence that something miraculous and marvelous had happened. The evidence was incontrovertible (Rackham).

They Conferred “But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves saying, ‘What shall we do to these men? For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them *is* evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it’” (4:15-16). The judges dismissed the accused (Peter and John) and the witness (the healed man) and conferred in a private session. Their dilemma was that, on the one hand, they did want this message to spread (4:17), but, on the other hand, they could not deny the evidence of such an obvious miracle (4:16). The Greek word translated “miracle” means “sign.” What they saw was proof of something. This is not only a concession to the fact of the miracle but to its logical consequences (Alexander).

“But so that it spreads no further among the people, let us severely threaten them, that from now on they speak to no man in this name” (4:17). The Sanhedrin concluded that the solution was to severely threaten Peter and John. After all, they had not broken any law in healing the cripple and, besides, the healing had made them popular heroes among the people (Bruce).

They Commanded “And they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus” (4:18). So the Sanhedrin called Peter and John back into their chamber and commanded them to never speak or teach in the name of Jesus Christ ever again. The distinction between “speak” and “teach” is not the difference between private talk and public speaking. Both verbs refer to the act of public speaking. The distinction is that the first relates more to sound or utterance and the second to the matter uttered or the subject of the discourse (Alexander).

This story begins in chapter 3 when Peter healed a lame man. One of the threads that runs throughout the story is the “name of Jesus.” Peter healed a lame man in the name of Jesus (3:6) and told the crowd that it was through faith in the name of Jesus that the man was healed (3:16). When the religious leaders interrogated Peter, they wanted to know about what name he did what he did (4:7). Peter told them that he healed in the name of Jesus (4:10) and that salvation was in no other name than that of Jesus (4:12). They now tell Peter and John not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus (4: 18).

The Response “But Peter and John answered and said to them, ‘Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge’” (4:19). Peter and John reach their own

conclusion. They announced that the Sanhedrin would have to decide whether it was right for them to hear and heed the council rather than God. In other words, they were saying to the council, “You may judge for yourself, and take the consequences of your own decision” (Alexander). They are telling the Sanhedrin, “If the divine command and a human regulation were in conflict, they would conclude without hesitation that the divine command must be obeyed at all cost (Bruce).

“For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” (4:20). Peter and John explained (“for”) they could not avoid speaking what they had seen and heard. When Socrates was given an offer of release on the condition that he give up the discussion of truth and wisdom, he replied, “I shall obey God rather than you” (Bruce). One of the laws of life is that we speak about what we have experienced. We cannot help it.

The Release “So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way of punishing them, because of the people, since they all glorified God for what had been done” (4:21). At this point, the Sanhedrin had no choice but to let Peter and John go. They could find no way to punish them without stirring up the people. Therefore, they added more threats and released them.

“For the man was over forty years old on whom this miracle of healing had been performed” (4:22). The explanation (“for”) for why the people were so impressed with the miracle that they were constantly glorifying God is their realization that he had been lame for 40 years. The cure of a man who had been ill for 40 years made the miracle all the more remarkable (Marshall).

Summary: When the religious leaders commanded the apostles not to teach in the name of Jesus Christ, they responded that they had to obey God rather than man.

Peter himself instructs believers to obey the government. He writes, “Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake. Whether to the king as supreme or to governors, as to those he sends for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men, as free yet not using your liberty as a cloak for vice, but as servants of God. Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king” (1 Pet. 2:13-17). Submission to constituted authority is to be a voluntary acceptance of a position of obedience (Grudem on 1 Pet.). Peter says the reason for submission to government is “For the Lord’s sake” (1 Pet. 2:13); it is the will of God (1 Pet. 2:15). The practical result of submission to government is that by doing good, believers will “put to silence the ignorance of foolish men” (1 Pet. 2:15).

Yet Peter told government officials he would not obey them. Did Peter make a mistake that he corrected later? No. There is a limit to authority. When any authority oversteps its constituted authority, believers must obey God rather than man. This is not a warrant for all civil disobedience. There must be a clear command from God. “There can be no doubt that God must be obeyed rather than man whenever it comes to a clash between the two” (Marshall).

Peter and John were not the only ones in the Bible who disobeyed human authority to obey God. The list of conscientious objectors would include the Jewish midwives (Ex. 1), Moses’ parents (Heb. 11:23), Daniel (Dan. 1, 6), and the three Hebrew children (Dan. 3). Wiersbe says, “The midwives and Moses’ parents knew that it was wrong to murder the babies. Daniel, his friends, and the three Hebrew men knew it was wrong to eat food offered to idols or bow down to idols in worship. Peter and John knew that they were under orders from their master to preach the gospel to the ends of the earth and that it would be wrong to obey the Sanhedrin. All of these

people were faithfully obeying a clear word from God and not just following some selfish personal whim of their own.”

This story is not about disobedience. It is about obedience. Peter and John were committed to obeying the Lord, no matter the cost or consequence. Sometimes to be obedient, and we must be disobedient. There are times when to obey God, we disobey man.

The three Hebrew children were told to bow to an idol or be pitched into a fiery furnace. They obeyed God and said, “O God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image you have set up” (Dan. 3:17-18). It was said of John Knox, “He feared God so much that he never feared the face of any man.”

THE FREEDOM TO SPEAK

As a believer in Jesus Christ, have you ever been afraid to witness? When it comes to witnessing, there are degrees of fear. Virtually all believers have a natural fear of talking about the Lord. The next level is hesitating to speak in anticipation of rejection. Then comes the apprehension because the intended audience has already voiced opposition. After that, there is fear because you have been threatened if you speak. What do you do when you face fear in witnessing for Christ? No sooner was the church born than they faced this very situation. Peter and John healed a lame man. As a result, they were arrested, told not to ever speak in the name of Jesus Christ again, and they were threatened if they did. Here's how they handle that situation. Fear can silence you (Jn. 7:13). How do you handle that?

The Report

The Return “And being let go, they went to their own *companions* and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them” (4:23). Being released from prison, Peter and John returned to “their own.” Rackham says the expression “their own” refers to the apostles. Bruce says it includes their fellow apostles and other believers. Marshall suggested it was a close circle of friends and supporters, obviously a smaller group than the community mentioned in Acts 4:4.

The Report Peter and John also reported what the religious leaders told them. The “chief priests” (plural) are Annas and Caiaphas, mentioned in verse 6 (Alexander). The Sanhedrin had ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus and threatened them if they did (4:17-18, 21). The threat was no doubt designed to produce fear. What would be their response? It would have been natural for a deep depression to fall upon the church as they looked ahead to the trouble that was sure to descend upon them (Barclay).

The Request

Praise “So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: “Lord, You *are* God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them” (4:24). The response of the assembly was prayer! They were not intimidated by the threats, nor silenced by fear. The explanation of “they raise their voices to God with one accord” is either one person spoke, but the whole congregation was unified in what was said, or all prayed aloud and Luke does not record the exact words of any one individual (Alexander). The most likely explanation is that one spoke for the whole company (Marshall). Unity promotes prayer and division, hinders it.

They addressed God as “Lord,” which is not the normal word for lord, but the term for “master” from which we get the English word “despot.” The idea is that God is the “Sovereign Lord” (Marshall; Wiersbe). They began their prayer with praise that God was the Creator of the entire natural universe, implying He is in control (Ps. 146:6; Isa. 37:16; see also Neh. 9:6; Ps. 145; Isa. 42; 1 Pet. 4:19).

Psalm “Who by the mouth of Your servant David have said: ‘Why did the nations rage, and the people plot vain things? The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together against the LORD and against His Christ’” (4:25-26). Their prayer quotes Psalm 2:1-2 (13:33; Heb. 1:5, 5:5). Prayer and Scripture go together (Jn. 15:7). The Psalm begins with the nations and people raging and plotting. Then, it moves from the many to the mighty. The kings and the rulers gathered to plot against the Lord and His Messiah.

“For truly against Your Holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done” (4:27-28). The people praying apply the Psalm to those who crucified Jesus. Herod Antipas (Alexander; Bruce), Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel gathered, so to speak, but what they decided to do is what God had determined to do before they met (2:23; 3:18). It is God who is in control. It is futile for people to scheme against God, who not only created the whole universe but also foresaw their scheming (Marshall).

Petition “Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word” (4:29). They petition the Lord to look at their situation. In doing so, they acknowledge that He is Lord and they are His servants. The Greek word translated “servants” means “slaves” (see “master” in 4:24 and “lord” here). They requested that they be granted boldness to speak God’s Word. They desired “all” boldness, the highest degree or every kind of boldness (Alexander). They wanted the courage to proclaim their message without fear or favor (Bruce).

“By stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your Holy Servant Jesus” (4:30). They ask that more miracles be done in the name of Jesus. They did not ask for protection. They sought God for power. Wiersbe says, “They did not pray to have their circumstances changed or their enemies put out of office. Rather, they ask God to empower them to make the best use of the circumstances and to accomplish what he had already determined (Acts 4:28)”. He goes on to quote Phillips Brookes, who said, “Do not pray for easy lives. Pray to be stronger men and women. Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers. Pray for powers equal to your tasks.”

The Result

The Place was Shaken “And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken” (4:31a). Because of their prayer, the place was shaken as if an earthquake had taken place. This is reminiscent of what happened on the day of Pentecost, but it was not a “second Pentecost” because Pentecost can no more be repeated than Calvary can be repeated (Wiersbe). In the Old Testament, this was a sign of the presence of God (Ex. 19:18; Ps. 68:8; Alexander). The assurance of God’s favor came even as they prayed (Bruce). He signified that He was present and would answer their prayer (Marshall).

Years ago, a church in New York City installed a new organ that required an electrical current to operate. On the first Sunday morning, the new organ was scheduled to be used, the organist discovered that the new majestic organ had no power. An electrician was summoned, who appeared on the scene after the service started. Everyone wanted to know how soon he could get the power on. After he investigated, he estimated how long it would take him to fix the problem. The ushers calculated at what point in the service the organ would be working and sent a note to the platform’s people and the organist. It said, “After the prayer, the power will be on.”

They Spoke with Boldness “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness” (4:31b). They received a fresh filling of the Spirit, but not a fresh baptism (Bruce). Evidently, the filling of the Spirit resulted in boldness. They spoke God’s message with boldness. The Greek word translated “boldness” means “freedom of speech, plainness, openness, confidence, boldness.”

Peter Cartwright was a preacher who lived during the time of President Andrew Jackson. On one occasion, the President unexpectedly attended a service where Cartwright was to speak. The deacons called the preacher from the platform to inform him that the President of the United States was in the congregation. They also urged him to be careful what he said. As he stood up to give his message, Cartwright began, “I understand that Andrew Jackson is with us and I’ve been requested to guard in my remarks. Andrew Jackson will go to hell as quickly as any other man if he does not repent!” The audience was shocked, wondering how the president would react. At the close of the service, Jackson stepped forward to speak to Cartwright. He said, “Sir, if I had a regimen of men like you, I could whip the world.”

Summary: The freedom to speak for Christ is the result of prayer and the working of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer.

How does this work in our case? Do we call a prayer meeting and God zaps us with the Holy Spirit? The filling of the Holy Spirit is connected to being filled with the Word of God (Eph. 5:18; Col. 3:15). Note how that is true in this passage (4:24, 25-26, 31). We need to be filled with the Word. Then, we need to pray—especially in a group. We need to depend on the Lord.

Barclay writes, “Once the papal envoy threatened Martin Luther with what would follow if he persisted in his course and warned him that in the end he would be deserted by all of his supporters. ‘Where will you be then?’ demand of the envoy. ‘Then as now,’ Luther answered, ‘in the hand of God.’”

THE SIN UNTO TO DEATH

In a sense, all sin is sin. In another sense, some sins are more serious than others. Some sins are so serious they can cause premature physical death. The New Testament speaks of a sin unto death (1 Jn. 5:16). Luke records a story that illustrates a sin unto death. He describes the extraordinary generosity of a church followed by two illustrations, one positive and one negative (Marshall).

A Generous Church

Great Unity “Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common” (4:32). The body of believers was unified. They had a “common mind and purpose;” they were united in their devotion to the Lord (Marshall). They had a “God-given unity, not a man-made organizational uniformity.” Aristotle is reported to have defined friendship as “one’s soul residing in two bodies” (Alexander). They placed their possessions in a common fund. They had a common purpose and a common purpose. “Giving is a blessing and not a burden” (Wiersbe).

Great Power “And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus” (4:33a). The apostles preached the resurrection of the Lord Jesus with power, not merely with force of argument or eloquence, but in the exercise of extraordinary spiritual power (Alexander).

Great Grace “And great grace was upon them all” (4:33b). Great power was on the apostles and great grace was on all the believers.

Great Generosity “Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold and laid them at the apostles’ feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need” (4:34-35). All the believers who owned land or houses sold what they own, and gave it to the apostles, who distributed money to those who had a need. The feet of the apostles “suggests some kind of legal transfer expressed in formal language” (Marshall). The result was no one lacked the necessities of life. Their unselfishness solved the problem of poverty—for a time (Rackham).

This is not communism. These were voluntary acts of genuine benevolence (5:4), not “a social regulation or an article of primitive church polity, but the natural and necessary acting out of the principle of oneness” (Alexander). Their motivation was love (Wiersbe), not fear of governmental control. This is not the pattern for giving. Wiersbe says the pattern of giving today is not Acts 4:34 but Acts 11:29 (Wiersbe on 11:29). This is simply an example of extraordinary generosity. Barclay says this was not the result of legislation; it was “utterly spontaneous.” He adds, “It is not when the law compels us to share, but when the heart moves us to share, that society will become really Christian.”

If you were asked to describe a great church, what would you say? Many Americans would immediately think of a large church. Does the quantity or quality of members determine a great church? Some would say a great church has a great outreach. Is the measure of a church its breath or its depth? Others might suggest that a great church has a long history. Can a church that does not have a long history be great? A great church is committed to the Lord and to each other.

Wiersbe talks about being involved in the building program. At one point, he suggested to the architect that perhaps they could build a simple edifice with a more elaborate front to make it look like an expensive church. The architect replied, “Absolutely not! The church stands for truth and honesty and any church I design will not have a facade! The building should tell the truth, not pretend to be what it isn’t” (Wiersbe).

Barnabas: A Great Saint

An Encourager “And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus” (4:36). Having described the spirit of self-sacrifice prevailing in the whole body of believers, Luke now describes to specific cases (Alexander). The first specific case concerns a man named “Joses.” He was a Levite from Cyprus. The apostles named him “Barnabas,” which means “Son of Encouragement.” The Greek word rendered “encouragement” means “exhortation, encouragement, consolation, comfort.” Alexander calls him an exhorter, but this spiritual gift (Rom. 12) includes the ability to exhort and comfort. Rackham says, “Encouragement covers both elements.” Bruce calls him an encourager.

An Example “Having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet” (4:37). Technically, priest and Levites (4:36) were not landowners (Num. 18:20; Deut. 10:9), but this rule was not practiced (Rackham; Bruce). Barnabas sold his land and gave the proceeds to the common treasury.

Barnabas provides an example worthy of emulation, but believers today are not required to imitate this illustration of sacrifice and loving generosity (Wiersbe). There are, however, examples worthy of emulation today. I know of a situation in our church where a man gave a car to a fellow who really needed it. In fact, that has happened twice!

Ananias and Sapphira: A Grievous Sin

Ananias “But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession” (5:1). Ananias stands in stark contrast to Barnabas. Both laid that money at the apostle’s feet (4:37; 5:2). The second specific case involves a married couple who failed of the grace of God (Rackham).

The couple sold a possession. “And he kept back *part* of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it, and brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles’ feet” (5:2). Ananias had a right to keep back part of the sale of the property (Bruce). The problem was that he claimed that he had given it all (Marshall). He was covetous; he fell to the greed of gain, as did Achan (Rackham, who says see “pilfering” in Titus 2:10). Bruce points out that the Greek word translated “kept back” here is the same as the one that appears in the Greek translation of Joshua 7:1 (see also Marshall). His wife was aware and no doubt, was part of what he did. To human observers, it appeared that Ananias did precisely what had been done by Barnabas and many others (Alexander).

“But Peter said, ‘Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back *part* of the price of the land for yourself?’” (5:3). Instead of being filled with the Holy Spirit, Ananias allowed Satan to fill his heart. Marshall says that the expression “filled your heart” may represent a Semitic idiom that means “has made you dare” (Esther 7:5; Eccl. 8:11).

Wiersbe says Satan energized them. He imagines Satan whispering to the couple, “You can also bask in this kind of glory! You can make others think that you are as spiritual as Barnabas!”

By keeping back part of the profit for himself but pretending he was giving all of it, Ananias lied to the assembly of believers (5:4) and, more importantly, to the Holy Spirit. Satan is the one who filled his heart and head with the idea of lying to the Holy Spirit and deceiving believers. Satan’s influence was not coercive (Alexander); he could have been resisted (Jas. 4:7).

Wiersbe points out, “Satan had failed completely in his attempt to silence the witness of the church. However, the enemy never gives up; he simply changes his strategy. His first approach was to attack the church from the outside, holding that arrest and threats would frighten leaders. When that failed, Satan decided to attack the church *from the inside* and use people who were part of the fellowship.”

“While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God” (5:4). Peter points out that Ananias did not have to give the money. He could have given all, part or none of it without lying about it. Rather than that, he chose to lie to both men and God. “The use of the terms *God* and *Holy Ghost*, in these two verses, as convertible expressions, has always and most justly been regarded as a strong proof both of the personality and divinity of the Spirit” (Alexander).

One morning, four high school boys could not resist the temptation to skip school. After lunch, they showed up and told the teacher they were late because the car had a flat tire. She smiled, informing them that they had missed a quiz. She asked them to take their seats and get out a pencil and a piece of paper. Still smiling, she waited for them to get ready for her questions. Finally, she said, “The first question is, “Which tire was flat?” Be sure your sin will find you out!

“Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. So great fear came upon all those who heard these things (5:5) and the young men arose and wrapped him up, carried *him* out, and buried *him*” (5:6). Ananias committed the sin unto death (1 Cor. 11:30). Christians die “prematurely,” for serious sins (Bruce). The result was great fear came upon all who heard what had happened, not just those who saw what happened. The fear included religious awe and terror (Alexander). It was a “sense of dread” (Marshall). The young men who buried her were probably the church’s young men, not professional buriers (Bruce). Apparently, the normal customs from mourning and burial did not apply in the case of a sinner struck down by the hand of God (Marshall). Peter is portrayed as a man with supernatural insight who can pronounce a curse on sinners, just like Paul (Acts 13:8-11).

Sapphira “Now it was about three hours later when his wife came in, not knowing what had happened” (5:7). About three hours later, unaware of what had happened to her husband Ananias, Sapphira came to the assembly. It has been suggested that perhaps this refers to two successive hours of prayer, the interval between which would have been three hours (Alexander).

“And Peter answered her, ‘Tell me whether you sold the land for so much?’ She said, ‘Yes, for so much’ (5:8). Peter asked Sapphira how much money they made on selling their land to demonstrate that it did not match the amount her husband had given. He allowed her to repent (Marshall).

“Then Peter said to her, ‘How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband *are* at the door, and they will carry you out’” (5:9). Peter asked Sapphira why she and her husband agreed to test the Lord. Alexander says they were trying His patience. Wiersbe says they deliberately disobeyed God to see how far He would go; they defied, daring Him to act. They committed the same sin as the

Israelites in the wilderness (Ex. 17:2; Deut. 6:16). When we are more concerned about our reputation than our character, there is no end to the things we will do to make ourselves ‘look good’ in the eyes of others.”

Pointing out that the men who had buried her husband were just returning from his burial, Peter tells Sapphira that she, too, will be carried out for burial. It only took about three hours to bury Ananias because his body was probably deposited uncoffined in the horizontal niches of an open sepulcher above ground (Alexander).

“Then immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. And the young men came in and found her dead, and carrying *her* out, buried *her* by her husband” (5:10). Like her husband, Sapphira immediately dropped dead and was buried by the young men of the congregation. Like her husband, Sapphira wanted to look good instead of be good. She and her husband practiced deliberate deception. Hypocrisy is trying to make people think that we’re spiritual when we are not.

“So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things” (5:11). As with Ananias’s death, great fear came upon all who heard what had happened, not just those who saw what happened. The fear included religious awe, terror, and a “sense of dread” (5:5). In this passage, there has been “great power” and “great grace” (4:33) and now “great fear.”

Summary: When believers live in unity and practice generously, God blesses them with power and grace, but when they dishonor Him and deceive each other, He sometimes judges those who commit such grievous sins with premature physical death.

Ananias and Sapphira were believers. Bruce says that it cannot be said for certain that Ananias and Sapphira were not genuine believers unless one is prepared to say that no one who commits an act of deliberate deceit can be a genuine believer (see also Wiersbe).

Ananias and Sapphira committed a grievous sin. In the first place, they lied to the Lord. They also deliberately deceived the church.

Ananias and Sapphira died prematurely. Some sins are so serious that they result in severe judgment. Wiersbe points out that the Lord judged sin severely at the beginning of a new period. After the Tabernacle was erected, Nadab and Abihu were killed for trying to present “false fire” to the Lord (Lev. 10). Achan also died for disobeying orders after Israel was in the Promised Land (Josh. 7). “The early church accepted the possibility of serious judgments following upon acts of sin (1 Cor. 5:1-11; 11:27-32; Jas. 1:14-16)” (Marshall). In the case of Acts 5, the sin was lying to the Lord and deceiving the congregation. It was a sin against the congregation.

Does this apply to believers today? Yes. There is a sin unto death (1 Jn. 5:16). What sins qualify as a sin that God judges with premature physical death? For one thing, those who live according to the flesh will pre-maturely die (Rom. 8:13), eventually (Jas. 1:14-16). It should be pointed out that had Ananias and Sapphira judged their own sin, God would not have judged them (1 Cor. 11:31). Unfortunately, they chose not to do that and consequently, they experienced the judgment of God. The writer to the Hebrews warns, “Our God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:18-19).

The other serious and grievous sin is a sin against a church. Paul says, “If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are” (1 Cor. 3:17). The word translated “defile” is the same one translated “destroy.” Those who were destroying the church were the dissenters who were spoiling it by dividing its unity. They will be themselves destroyed. In the New Testament, the Greek word render defile/destroy is never used of hell. It refers to physical death (1 Cor. 11:31).

Believers should live together in unity and be generous to please the Lord. When they do not do that, they dishonor the Lord and deceive one another.

There is a legend about an ancient village in Spain. The villagers learned that the king would pay a visit! In a thousand years, a king had never come to that village. Then, they heard the king was coming. Someone suggested, "We must throw a big celebration." The villagers all agreed, but it was a poor village and there weren't many resources. Someone came up with a classic idea. Since many of the villagers made their own wines, the idea was for everyone in the village to bring a large cup of their choice of wine to the town square, "We'll pour it into a large vat and offer it to the king for his pleasure! When the king draws wine to drink, it will be the very best he's ever tasted!"

The day before the king's arrival, hundreds of people lined up to make their offering to the honored guest. They climbed a small stairway and poured their gift through a small opening at the top. Finally, the vat was full! When the king arrived, he was escorted to the square, given a silver cup, and told to draw some wine, representing the best the villagers had.

He placed the cup under the spigot, turned the handle, and drank the wine, but it was only water. Every villager had reasoned, "I'll withhold my best wine and substitute water. With so many cups of wine in the vat, the king will never know the difference!" The problem was everyone thought the same thing, and the king was greatly dishonored.

Today's problem with the church is that believers want to look good and not be good. They put in their amount of water to look like they are really doing something. Think of what a church could be if all put in their best!

WHEN IS THE RIGHT TIME?

Jesus Christ has commissioned us to proclaim the Gospel to the whole world. There are times when we ask ourselves if it is the right time. For example, what do you do if the audience opposes the Gospel? An incident in the early church illustrated the answer for those of us who live at this late date in church history.

A Time of Opportunity

The Gathering “And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon’s Porch” (5:12). The Solomon Porch part of the Temple became the gathering place of the apostles and those that came to hear their teachings and see their miracles. There was unity among all the believers, who were allowed to assemble daily without intrusion (Alexander).

The General Regard “Yet none of the rest dared join them, but the people esteemed them highly” (5:13). There are several different explanations of the expression of “the rest,” including the people in the Temple who were content to be spectators (Alexander) and the rest of the Christian body as distinct from the apostles (Rackham). The “rest” were the others in the Temple area who did not join the believers but admired them. In Luke 8:10, the term “rest” is used of non-disciples and it seems to become almost a technical term for nonbelievers (Marshall, who cites 1 Thess. 4:13, 5:6). The Greek word translated “joined” means “to glue or cement together, to cleave, to join.” The Greek word rendered “esteemed them highly” means “to declare great, extol, magnify.” There were people in the Temple who did not join the group of believers, but they admired them and spoke well of them.

The Gracious Salvation “And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women” (5:14). At the same time, many did believe in the Lord. Luke no longer gives the specific number but mentions that both men and women trusted the Lord.

The Great Healings “So that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid *them* on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them” (5:15). The believers brought the sick to the apostles to be healed. The beds and the couches have been explained as the beds of the rich and the poor (see Alexander). At any rate, even the bedridden were healed. The fact that they wanted the shadow of Peter to fall on the sick sounds like superstition, but it is an indication of their strong faith (19:12). It is like the faith of the centurion (Mt. 8:10) and the woman with the flow of blood, who just want to touch the garment of Jesus (Mt. 9:22).

“Also, a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed” (5:16). People from the cities surrounding Jerusalem brought the sick and demon-possessed to be healed.

This was a time of opportunity. The apostles had the freedom to preach publicly. Believers were held in high regard. People were being saved. People were being healed. God was working.

A Time of Opposition

The Detainment “Then the high priest rose up, and all those who were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees) and they were filled with indignation” (5:17). The people admired what was happening (5:13); the religious leaders were furious. The High Priest, probably Annas (Alexander), and the Sadducees with him were filled with indignation. The believers were filled (the same Greek word as the one used here) with the Holy Spirit (2:4; 4:8, 4:31; 9:17; 13:9). The Greek word rendered “indignation” means “zeal, jealousy.” Some take it here as “religious zeal” directed against opponents of the traditional Jewish religion (Marshall). Others take it to be a reference to “a real jealousy of the influence of rival teachers” (Rackham).

“And laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison” (5:18). The religious leaders had the apostles, meaning the twelve (Alexander), arrested. Persecution against the church has intensified. Prior to this, the first persecution only involved Peter and John and resulted in a simple threat (4:21). This second persecution involved the Twelve and resulted in physical suffering (5:40-41).

The Deliverance “But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, ‘Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life’” (5:19-20). Sometime during the night, an angel opened the prison door, escorted them out of prison, and told them to preach about “this life” in the Temple. “This life” has been defined as “the gospel of the Prince of Life” (Rackham, who cites 3:15). It is an “apt term for the message of salvation” (Bruce; Marshall). God supernaturally delivered them. Most interestingly, the Sadducees did not believe in angels, and God used angels to deliver the apostles from jail.

“And when they heard that, they entered the temple early in the morning and taught.” Without reservation or the fear of man, they did what they usually did and as the angel had instructed them to do.

You never know what is going to happen next. One minute they were enjoying freedom and favor; the next minute they were objects of jealousy and were in jail. When the phone rings, you never know what will be on the other end. Being right with God sometimes means being in trouble with people. The command to evangelism still stands even in times of trouble.

A Time of Oppression

The Discovery “But the high priest and those with him came and called the council together, with all the elders of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. But when the officers came and did not find them in the prison, they returned and reported saying, ‘Indeed we found the prison shut securely, and the guards standing outside before the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside!’” (5:21-23). When the Sanhedrin convened, they sent the Temple officers (5:22) for the prisoners. The officers, of course, discovered that the prisoners were not in the prison! They reported that the prison was securely shut; the doors were locked (Bruce). The guards were on guard, but the prisoners were not there. Evidently, the guards were unconscious during the escape of the prisoners, and the doors were locked after their departure. Consequently, there was no suspicion that the prisoners had vanished until this point (Marshall).

The Detainment “Now when the high priest, the captain of the temple, and the chief priests heard these things, they wondered what the outcome would be. So, one came and told them, saying, ‘Look, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!’” (5:24-25). The leaders of the Sanhedrin were worried about the outcome of this. While

they pondered their perplexity, they were informed that the prisoners were teaching in the Temple.

“Then the captain went with the officers and brought them without violence, for they feared the people, lest they should be stoned” (5:26). The captain of the Temple and the officers of the Temple arrested the apostles again, but so great was their fear of the people stoning them that they did so without any roughness (Rackham). “No force was used; no resistance was offered” (Bruce).

“And when they had brought them, they set *them* before the council. And the high priest asked them saying, ‘Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man’s blood on us!’” (5:27-28). The apostles were charged with disobeying the command not to teach in the name of Jesus (4:18) and with inciting the people to rise against the Sanhedrin to take vengeance for the death of Jesus (Rackham).

The Defense “But Peter and the *other* apostles answered and said: ‘We ought to obey God rather than men’” (5:29). The apostles told the Sanhedrin that they had to obey God rather than man. The expression “Peter and the other apostles” implies that Peter replied on behalf of the whole group, as he had done on the day of Pentecost (Bruce).

“The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree” (5:30). They also again charge that the Sanhedrin had killed Jesus. God raising Jesus is probably a reference to the inauguration of Jesus’ ministry (Bruce). In this case, *after* God raised Him up, He was killed. However, some say it refers to God raising Jesus from the dead (Marshall).

“Him God has exalted to His right hand *to be* Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins” (5:31). God also exalted Jesus to His right hand to be a Prince and Saviour. The Greek word translated “Prince” means “founder, author, prince, leader.” It is used in Acts 3:15, Hebrews 2:10 and Hebrews 12:2. Jesus is “a pioneer, one who leads the way, an originator” (Wiersbe).

Wiersbe says the title “savior” is used of physicians who save people’s lives, philosophers who solve people’s problems, and statesmen who save people from danger. Jesus Christ is the Savior who rescues from sin, death, and judgment.

Several passages in the New Testament speak of God granting repentance (Acts 5:31; 11:18; 2 Tim. 2:25). Some commentators take this passage to mean that God gave repentance as a gift. Commenting on Acts 11:18, Bruce says that God gave them “through His Spirit a change of mind and heart and the assurance of eternal life.” Concerning 2 Timothy 2:25, Hiebert says, “Only God can affect the change in them. He must ‘give’ it to them as a gift, using Timothy’s efforts as a means to work the needed ‘repentance’ in them.” Guthrie thinks that 2 Timothy implies that repentance is a gift from God.”

Other commentators argue that these verses say that God allows people to repent. The Greek word translated “grant” means “to give,” but it is used “in various senses” such as “bestow, grant, supply, deliver, commit, yield” (A-S, p. 114). Does this mean that God gives repentance as a gift? No. God giving Israel repentance (Acts 5:31) cannot mean He gave the nation the gift of repentance. Only a few repented! Therefore, the expression “to give repentance to Israel” must mean that God allowed the people of Israel to repent.

Commenting on Acts 11:18, Marshall says, “Through whom (Jesus Christ) the people of Israel might have the opportunity to repentance and receive forgiveness of their sins. Here is the offer of salvation to the very people who had crucified Jesus.” Concerning Acts 11:18, he says that God “granted *to the Gentiles* as well as to the Jews the opportunity of repenting of their sins

and thus of obtaining eternal life (5:20; 13:46, 48). This opportunity was provided in the preaching of the gospel.” Kent, a Greek professor, says that 2 Timothy 2:25 says, “By faithful teaching directed toward those who have set themselves in opposition to the truth (victims as well as the teachers), there is always the possibility that God would use the instruction to produce repentance.”

“And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him” (5:32). Furthermore, the apostles declared that they were witnesses to all of this. The Holy Spirit also bears witness. The work of the Holy Spirit was evidence that Jesus had returned to heaven and sent His Spirit as He promised (Wiersbe). God gave the gift of the Holy Spirit to believers, which is a further testimony to the reality of the exaltation of Jesus since the Spirit is regarded as the gift of the exalted Messiah (Marshall). The Holy Spirit bore witness by the miracle wrought through the apostles. The gift of the Holy Spirit is not a reward for obedience because a gift can only be received by faith. The phrase “obey Him” means “to be obedient to the faith” (6:7), that is, to obey God’s call to trust God’s Son. God does not *suggest* that sinners repent and believe; He *commends* it (Acts 17:30).

“When they heard *this*, they were furious and plotted to kill them” (5:33). The members of the Sanhedrin were so furious with the apostles that they plotted to kill them. The apostles did not change their convictions; they trusted God to take care of the consequences (Wiersbe).

The Deliverance “Then one in the council stood up, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in respect by all the people, and commanded them to put the apostles outside for a little while” (5:34). At that point, Gamaliel stood and requested that the apostles be taken outside the meeting so that they could have a private session. Gamaliel was a respected teacher and one of the most celebrated teachers of the Law (Rackham). “According to a later tradition, he was a disciple of Hillel, whom he succeeded as head of his school” (Bruce). Saul, who later became the apostle Paul, was one of his pupils.

“And he said to them: ‘Men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do regarding these men’” (5:35). Gamaliel warned the Sanhedrin to take heed to what they intended to do to the apostles.

“For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody. A number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was slain, and all who obeyed him were scattered and came to nothing” (5:36). Gamaliel reminds the Sanhedrin of two past cases that involved rising stars, who came to nothing. His advice is, “Leave it alone” (Rackham). Nothing is known about Theudas (Bruce). Josephus tells the story of a man named Theudas, but Theudas lived ten years after this (Rackham). Josephus describes four men bearing the name of Simon within 40 years of the death of Herod the Great and three who bore the name of Judah within ten years, all of whom were instigators of rebellion (Knowling, cited by Marshall).

“After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away many people after him. He also perished, and all who obeyed him were dispersed” (5:37). Judas of Galilee rose in revolt during the census of AD 6 (Rackham), but he too was killed and his followers were dispersed. The movement came to nothing.

“And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing, but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it; lest you even be found to fight against God” (5:38-39). His advice consisted of “sound Pharisaic teaching; God is over all and needs no help from men for the fulfillment of His purposes; all men must do is to obey and leave the issue to Him” (Findley, cited by Bruce).

Wiersbe points out that even though Gamaliel tried to use cool logic rather than overheated emotion, his approach was wrong. He assumed that “history repeats itself.” He also made the mistake of assuming that if something is not of God, it will fail, but this idea does not take into consideration the sinfulness of man or the presence of Satan. Mark Twain said, “A lie runs around the world while the truth is still putting on her shoes.” Cults often grow faster than the church. Wiersbe concludes, “How long should the council wait to see if the new movement would survive? What tests would they use to determine whether or not it was successful? What is success? No matter how you look at it, Gamaliel’s ‘wisdom was foolish.’”

This part of the story also illustrates that one lone man can stand between the church and its enemy. God often uses one individual to protect believers.

The Declaration “And they agreed with him, and when they had called for the apostles and beaten *them*, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go” (5:40). The Sanhedrin agreed with Gamaliel. The apostles were, nevertheless, given the Jewish punishment of forty stripes save one (Rackham; Marshall).

The Departure “So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name” (5:41). Not only did the punishment not deter them, but it also filled them with joy (Marshall). They had learned what Jesus taught them in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5:11-12).

“And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ” (5:42). The punishment they had received did not withstand, as they continued to instruct believers and evangelize the unbelievers, proclaiming that Jesus is the Messiah.

In his book, *The Gospel Blimp*, Joe Bayly wrote, “Jesus Christ didn’t commit the gospel to an advertising agency; He commissioned disciples.” The apostles were faithful even after a beating!

Summary: The apostles preached the gospel regardless of the circumstances.

Regardless of the circumstances, they took every opportunity to communicate the gospel. They were instant in season and out of season, during periods of opportunity, opposition, and oppression, when they were treated with the highest regard and when they were beaten like common criminals. They proclaimed the gospel publicly in the Temple and privately in homes. The right time is any time you have an opportunity to tell people about Jesus Christ.

Trust the Lord to work. In this case, God worked supernaturally and naturally. You never know what God will do.

Whatever happens, have a good attitude. They did it with a good attitude. They rejoiced for the opportunity and continued to teach and preach. William Temple said Christians are “called to the hardest of all tasks: to fight without hatred, to resist without bitterness, and in the end, if God grants it so, to triumph without vindictiveness.”

THE FIRST CHURCH DISPUTE

A church in Dallas became involved in a disagreement that became a dispute and resulted in not only a division but a split. Each faction filed a lawsuit to gain the church property. A judge referred the case to the denomination. A church court awarded the church property to one of the two factions. The losers formed another church. During the hearing, the church courts learned that the conflict began at a church dinner when an elder received a smaller slice of ham than a child seated next to him. A small issue can create a huge problem. Churches have been destroyed over things like a slice of ham. Someone complains that he or she is not appreciated or is being neglected. One pastor suggests that it comes “in the form of a critical glance, a name forgotten, a social gaffe, or some imagined offense. Bitter dissension ignites and spreads, and the whole work goes up in flames” (cited by Hughes).

Unfortunately, the church is often characterized by differences, debates, and disputes. When that happens, we automatically assume that the church today is not as spiritual as the church in New Testament times. The truth is that the church in the New Testament had difficulties too. What was the first dispute about and how did they resolve it?

The Problem

The Growth “Now in those days, when *the number of the disciples was multiplying*” (6:1a). The expression “in those days” may be understood to mean “while they were engaged in teaching and preaching” (5:42; Alexander). It was not just “believers” who were multiplying; it was “disciples,” that is, believers who were learning to follow Christ. Hodges calls them a “growing army of learners” who were under the ministry of the Word.

The Groups There was, however, a problem. “There arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists” (6:1b). The Hebrews were Jews, who were natives of Palestine, used the Hebrew Scriptures, and spoke Aramaic (1:19). The Hellenists were Jews, who were from outside Palestine and used the Greek language in worship (Alexander; Bruce; Marshall). Hodges says that since Chrysostom, the prevailing opinion is that the Hellenists were Greek-speaking Jews in contrast to Semitic-speaking Jews, but an alternative explanation is that they not only spoke the Greek language but also practiced Greek ways. He points out that, as a Hellenist, Stephen could foresee the possible cessation of the Temple worship.

This complaint was legitimate, but often complaints are not. One hot day, a family traveling down the highway between Johnstown and Jamestown stopped at farmer Jones’s place to ask for a drink of water, which he gladly gave them. “Where are you headed?” he asked them. “We are moving from Johnstown to Jamestown to live,” they told him. “Can you tell us what the people there are like?” “Well, what kind of people did you find where you lived before?” farmer Jones asked. “Oh, they were the very worst kind!” the people said. “They were gossipy, unkind, and indifferent. We are glad to move away.” “Well, I am afraid you will find the same in Jamestown,” replied farmer Jones. Another car stopped the next day, and the same conversation occurred. These people were moving to Jamestown, too. “What kind of neighbors will we find there?” they asked. “Well,” said farmer Jones, “what kind of neighbors did you have where you lived before?” “Oh, they were the very best! They were so kind and considerate that almost

broke our hearts to have to move away.” “Well, you will find exactly the same kind again,” farmer Jones replied.

The Grip “because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution” (6:1c). The Hellenists complained against the Hebrews that their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution, which was either the distribution of food or money to buy food (Bruce). The Greek word translated “neglected” means “neglected, overlooked.” It does not necessarily imply ill will or contempt. Perhaps the Hellenists were simply less known than the natives (Alexander). This was a particularly critical problem because the state made no provision for the poor or aged. Widows were among the poor. The Jews had a relief fund for widows and orphans (Rackham).

Evidently, some were saying that the way to dispel the hard feelings between the foreign Jews and the hometown crowd was to have the apostles distribute the goods (6:2; Hughes). You can imagine the criticism. “The apostles ought to be getting this job done. After all, they are in charge. Do they think waiting on tables is beneath their dignity? Are they better than Jesus? He washed his feet, and they were not willing to set a plate of food before a hungry woman. Did not Jesus say that the greatest was the servant?”

During spiritual growth, the problem of getting everything done rose. Actually, there are two problems here: the lack of distribution and the criticism of the apostles.

The Proposal

Find Servers “Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, ‘It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables’” (6:2). The “twelve” is a reference to the twelve apostles, the number of which was completed by the election of Matthias (1:26). The Greek word translated “desirable” means “pleasing, agreeable.” Although not expressed, the idea that is necessarily implied is that of “right” or “proper” (Alexander). The Greek word translated “serve tables” is the verb form of the noun translated “daily distribution” in verse 1. It is not that serving tables was inferior; it is that serving tables would interfere with the ministry of teaching and preaching the Word of God (“continually” in 6:4).

“Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of *good* reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business” (6:3). The qualifications for table servers was, first of all, they had to be of good character, “certified by public testimony” (Rackham). They must be men of God, full of the Holy Spirit (Bruce). In the final analysis, all church work is spiritual (Rackham). The need for wisdom was particularly important. Marshall renders this “wisdom, inspired by the Spirit.” They would have to deal wisely with a delicate situation. Barclay says wisdom is more than mere cleverness, shrewdness, or an intellectual grasp of truths. It is the “ability to take the long view of things, to see things as God sees them.” These three qualifications are personal (good reputation), spiritual (full of the Holy Spirit), and social (wisdom).

The Greek word translated “business” means “need, necessity, business.” It implies an emergency (Alexander). Barclay explains, “In the synagogue, there was a routine custom. Two collectors went around the market and private houses every Friday morning and made a collection for the needy, partly in money and partly in goods. Later in the day, this was distributed. Those who were temporarily in need received enough to enable them to carry on and those who were permanently unable to support themselves received enough for fourteen meals, that is, enough for two meals a day for the ensuing week. The fund from which this distribution was made was called the *Kuppah* or Basket. In addition to this, a house-to-house collection was

made daily for those in pressing need. This was called the *Tamhui*, or Tray. It is clear that the Christian Church had taken over this custom.”

This sounds as if there were many men characterized by a good reputation, spiritual mindedness, and wisdom (6:1, 3). In other words, this is what all believers should be.

Free the Ministry of the Word “But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word” (6:4). By appointing others to “serve tables,” the apostles would be free to devote themselves, without interruption, to the public ministry of the Word. The Greek word rendered “continually” means “to attend constantly, continue steadfastly, adhered to, wait on” (2:42).

Pastors ought to give themselves to the prayer and the ministry of the Word. Donald Grey Barnhouse said, “No man is ever going to be able to fulfill the pulpit adequately unless he spends thousands of hours a year, year after year, in the study of God’s word” (Barnhouse cited by Hughes). Sadly, many don’t. They give themselves to too many activities outside the church and too many committee meetings inside the church. Philips Brooks said, “I know of no department of human activity, from the governing of a great nation to the doctoring of a little boy, where a disposition is not constantly appealing to invent some sudden method or seek some magical and concise prescription which shall obviate the careful, comprehensive study and long-continued application. But this disposition is nowhere so strong, I think, as in the ministry” (Brooks, cited by Hughes).

The Procedure

The Options “And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch” (6:5). The proposal of the apostles pleased the multitude of the disciples. The multitude, not the apostles, selected seven men. The fact that they all had Greek names is not conclusive proof that they were all Hellenists because many Jews had double names (Alexander), but many have concluded that they were Greeks (Rackham; Bruce). Bruce suggests that they were probably the recognized leaders of the Hellenists.

Of the seven, Stephen is marked out as a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit. All seven were to be full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. Here, faith takes the place of wisdom in verse 3, not because the two words are synonymous but because wisdom is a fruit of faith (Alexander). Alexander suggests that the whole narrative is an introduction to Stephen’s martyrdom; therefore, he is singled out among the seven.

Nicolas is the only other one of the seven to be marked out somehow. He is described as a proselyte, a convert from paganism to Judaism and from Judaism to Christianity (Alexander). In other words, he was not a Jew at all (Rackham; Bruce). He is the only one of the seven to have his place of origin named, probably because Antioch becomes prominent later in the story. By the time of Irenaeus (ca. 180 AD), and probably early, Nicolas was held to be the founder of the Nicolaitans (Rev. 2:6, 15), but today that is considered uncertain (Bruce).

The Ordination “whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them” (6:6). The church selected these seven, but they were installed into office by the apostles. According to the Mishnah, members of the Sanhedrin were admitted by the laying on of hands (Bruce).

Although the title “deacon” is not used in this passage, nor anywhere in the whole book of Acts, many throughout church history, as far back as Irenaeus (ca. 185), have concluded that this

is a reference to the office of deacon. The verb form of the noun “deacon” is used in verse 2 (“serve” tables), but the noun is used in verse 4 of the “ministry” of the Word. Moreover, later in the book of Acts, Luke calls Philip “one of the seven” (Acts 21:8), not one of the deacons. Chrysostom says the seven were “neither presbyters nor deacons.” Rackham concludes that the office of the seven was unique, like the Twelve (Rackham, p. 86).

The Outcome “Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith” (6:7). The result of the apostles being freed to minister the Word was that the Word spread. As a result of the spreading of the Word of God, the number of disciples greatly increased and, beyond that, the number of priests who came to faith in Christ also greatly increased. The expression “obedient to the faith” simply means they obeyed the command to believe (Alexander; Marshall).

Summary: When a dispute arose in the early days of the church, the congregation selected it, and then the apostles ordained good, godly, and wise men to handle it so they could give themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word.

According to Bruce, Luke interrupts his narrative with a brief progress report. Six such reports throughout the book of Acts serve to punctuate the history (6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:31). Turner concludes that Acts is thus cut into six parcels to cover, on average, five years each.

Pastors should pray, prepare, and preach. In Ephesians 4:11, pastor and teacher are linked together. Believers should be growing disciples. Could your life be characterized by faith, wisdom, spiritual mindedness, and a good reputation? Disciples should be served. Stephen and Philip began waiting on tables and later became leaders (Lk. 16:10).

Jewish author Leo Rosten said, “I cannot believe that the purpose of life is to be happy. I think the purpose of life is to be useful, to be responsible, to be compassionate. It is, above all, to matter: to count, to stand for something, to have made some difference that you lived at all.”

During WW-II, a group of French prisoners was forced to work in a German munitions factory. Upon realizing that the very bombs they were building were being used to destroy their beloved homeland, they began doing things that would create a malfunction in the devices that detonated the bombs. The bombs were designed to explode on impact. However, with the changes, the prisoners made the bombs harmless, and when they hit, they did not explode. Puzzled by so many failed attacks, the French government conducted an investigation. Upon opening the bombs, they found slips of paper inside with the words: “We are doing the best we can with what we’ve got, where we are, every chance we get.” That ought to be the attitude of every believer.

THE STEPHEN PRINCIPLE

It happened many years ago. I do not remember when. I do not remember where. I do not remember who. All I remember is that someone told me a biblical story and drew a principle for it that has been helpful to me ever since. I call it the Stephen Principle.

The Arrest

The Miracles “And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people” (6:8). The congregation was to select seven men full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom (6:3). The ones chosen are described as full of the Holy Spirit and faith (6:5) and now Steven is said to be full of faith and power (6:8). Full of faith and power is “the third variation of the same essential formula” (Alexander). The work of the Holy Spirit produces wisdom and power. Before this, only the apostles performed miracles (2:43; 5:12). This is the first instance of someone other than an Apostle performing a miracle (8:6-7). The “great wonders and signs” no doubt included acts of healing (Bruce).

The Dispute “Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen” (6:9). Foreign Jews from North Africa and Asia Minor disputed with Stephen. In his ministry to the Hellenist, Stephen probably came into “contact and collision with their unbelieving relatives and friends” (Alexander). The mention of Cecilia suggests the possibility that this was the synagogue attended by Saul, whose native Tarsus was the principal city of Cecilia (Bruce; Wiersbe). Freeman were formerly enslaved people or the children of formerly enslaved people who their owners had emancipated (Bruce; Marshall). The Greek word translated “dispute” means “to discuss, dispute.” The subject of the dispute is not stated. The Messiahship of Jesus was no doubt part of the dispute (Bruce), but the remainder of the passage indicated it also concerned the Temple and the Law of Moses (6:14).

“And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke” (6:10). “He spoke with wisdom, for he spoke by inspiration” (Alexander).

The Plot “Then they secretly induced men to say, ‘We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God’” (6:11). Stephen’s opponents were not able to resist or refute him, so they resorted to recruiting people to lie (6:13). The lie was that Stephen was blaspheming God.

“And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes” (6:12a). Steven’s opponents succeeded in stirring up the religious leaders. This was easy to do because any threat to the Temple was not only a threat to their religious beliefs but also to their livelihood (Bruce).

The Arrest “And they came upon him, seized him, and brought him to the council” (6:12b). The religious leaders promptly had Steven arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin (Marshall). When their logic failed, they turned to force (Barclay).

The Trail “They also set up false witnesses who said, ‘This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us’” (6:13-14). Perverting what Steven had said (Alexander), the witnesses at the trial claimed that Stephen

blasphemed the Temple and the Law of Moses (6:13). More specifically (“for” in 6:14), they charged that Stephen said Jesus would destroy the Temple and change the ceremonial custom commanded by Moses. Jesus spoke about the destruction of the Temple (Mk. 13:2), and Stephen repeated His words. Marshall suggests that if Stephen had attacked the scribe’s elaborations of the Law, it would have been counted as an attack on Moses and if Stephen had attacked restricting the presence of God in the Temple, it would have been sufficient to lead to the opposition which he encountered.

“And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel” (6:15). As the members of the Sanhedrin stared at Stephen, they saw his face glow as it were an angel. Stephen stood with face aglow, “as one who stood consciously in the presence of God” (Bruce; see also Marshall). Perhaps it showed like Moses’s face when he returned from the Mountain (Ex. 34:29; see Alexander). It is as if God was saying, “This man is not against Moses! He is like Moses—he is my faithful servant!” (Wiersbe).

“Then the high priest said, “Are these things so?”” (7:1). As the presiding officer (Alexander), the High Priest asked if the accusation of his accusers was so. The high priest was probably Caiaphas, who presided over the trial of Jesus. He was in office until AD 36 (Bruce). Stephen is standing before the Sanhedrin. He is charged with a serious crime. The penalty for blasphemy is death by stoning (Rackham). He should have at least been apprehensive, if not fearful or even terrified. He was not afraid; he was full of faith (6:8). He trusted the Lord and it was obvious on his face that something beyond the natural was happening within him. The faith in his heart shone on his face. The members of the Sanhedrin had not heard him utter one word, but they took one look at him and thought this man was different.

People can tell a lot about us by our body language. When we are worried or fearful, we wring our hands. When we are resting in the Lord, there is an expression of calmness on our face. Patricia told me of seeing a lady at church coming toward her. The expression on the lady’s face immediately caught her attention. As she tried to describe it to me, she could not do it. All she could say was it was not the expression of a polite smile. It was just a “genuine something” deep within her bubbling up to her face. We ought to so trust the Lord so that people can see it on our faces.

The Message

Stephen does not give a defense. He delivers a message. Stephen’s speech is the longest in Acts. It is as long as the three sermons of Paul put together (Rackham). Rackham remarks that, at first sight, Stephen’s speech seems “baffling and disappointing” because there is no direct answer to the charges against him. Furthermore, the name of Jesus Christ does not occur at all. An accurate analysis of the address should consider not only the charges against Stephen, namely, that he blasphemed the Temple and the Law by saying that Jesus would destroy the Temple and change the Law (6:13-14), but also his conclusion that, like the forefathers, the current leaders were betrayers and murderers, who had not kept the Law (7:51-53).

The form of the speech is a panoramic view of Old Testament history, focusing on critical individuals and situations. The subject of the speech is what individuals did with the Law and the Temple, including individuals in the Old Testament and the religious leaders standing before Stephen. The outline of the speech consists of three parts: rejection of Israel (7:2-43), the limitation of the Temple (7:44-50), and the resistance of the religious leaders (7:51-53). This analysis fits the charges, which concern the Temple and the Law.

Rejection of Israel Stephen begins with the story of Abraham and his descendants through Joseph.

1. Abraham disobeyed God. God told Abraham to leave his country and relatives before he dwelt in Haran. “And he said, ‘Brethren and fathers, listen: The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran’ and said to him, ‘Get out of your country and from your relatives, and come to a land that I will show you’” (7:2-3). Stephen exhorts the religious leaders to “hear,” which seems to imply that something might be said that would offend their prejudices and, therefore, patience would be required on their part (Alexander). He refers to God as the “God of glory,” that is, the God who reveals Himself, which is the meaning of “glory” in the Old Testament (Alexander). God revealed Himself to Abraham when he was in *Mesopotamia*. Perhaps there is a subtle hint here that God revealed himself to Abraham, not when he was in the Land or even in the Temple, but when he was in Mesopotamia (modern Iraq). God’s presence is not restricted to the Temple.

Stephen quotes Genesis 12:1, saying God called Abraham *before* he dwelt in Haran. Genesis 11:31-12:3 seems to suggest that God appeared to Abraham *after* he arrived in Haran. Apparently, God called Abraham in Ur (“the Lord had said” in Gen. 12:1; Gen. 16:7; and Neh. 9:7) and renewed the call in Haran (Philo; Josephus; Alexander; Bruce; Marshall). Hodges says in Genesis 12 that the place of the call is unspecified (AV), but even if God appeared to Abraham in Ur, Genesis 12 might simply repeat it.

Abraham dwelt in Haran and left there when his father died. “Then he came out of the land of the Chaldeans and dwelt in Haran. And from there, when his father was dead, He moved him to this land in which you now dwell” (7:4). Stephen’s statement seems to contradict statements in Genesis that Terah was 70 years old when he begat Abram (Gen. 11:26), that Abram was 70 when he left Haran (Gen. 12:4) and that Terah lived to be 205 (Gen. 11:32), that is, 60 years after the migration of Abram to Canaan. Alexander suggests that the age given for Terah in Genesis 11:26 is when he begat his eldest son, as in the preceding genealogies, and that Abram was not the eldest son, but he was put first because of his prominence, as Napoleon might be named first in a list of Bonapartes, although he was not the eldest.

Abraham did not do what God told him to do. Before Abraham was in Haran, God told him to leave his relatives (7:3), but he took his father with him to Haran and did not leave Haran until his father died (7:4). Stephen points out that his hearers now live in the land God promised Abraham. In the Greek text, “you” is emphatic.

Once in the land, God did not give Abraham the land; He gave Abraham a promise. “And God gave him no inheritance in it, not even *enough* to set his foot on. But even when Abraham had no child, He promised to give it to him for a possession, and to his descendants after him. But God spoke in this way: that his descendants would dwell in a foreign land, and that they would bring them into bondage and oppress *them* four hundred years. And the nation to whom they will be in bondage I will judge,’ said God, ‘and after that they shall come out and serve Me in this place’” (7:5-7). God promised Abraham that he and his descendants would inherit the land before Abraham had a child! Stephen points out that Abraham believed in a promise made expressly to his offspring when he had none to enhance Abraham’s faith (Alexander). Abraham was a man of faith. According to Stephen, the descendants of Abraham would dwell in a foreign land for 400 years. God told Abraham it would be 400 years (Gen. 15:13; Josephus). Actually, it was precisely 430 years (Ex. 12:40-41). The number 400 may be a round number (Marshall), but rabbinical exegesis reckoned the 400 years as running from the birth of Isaac to the Exodus (Bruce).

“Then He gave him the covenant of circumcision and so *Abraham* begot Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac *begot* Jacob, and Jacob *begot* the twelve patriarchs” (7:8). God gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision. Abraham begat Isaac and Isaac begat Jacob, who begat the twelve patriarchs.

The message is that although Abraham believed God’s promise, he disobeyed.

2. The Patriarchs rejected Joseph, the deliverer. From Abraham came the twelve patriarchs. The patriarchs sold Joseph. “And the patriarchs, becoming envious, sold Joseph into Egypt” (7:9a). Because they were jealous of him, Joseph’s brothers sold him into slavery. This has been called “cruel conduct of the sons and Jacob toward their innocent and helpless brother (Alexander).

God was with Joseph. “But God was with him and delivered him out of all his troubles, and gave him favor and wisdom in the presence of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house” (7:9b-10). God was with Joseph as his “protector and preserve” (Alexander). To be more specific, God gave Joseph deliverance from his troubles, favor with Pharaoh and made him governor over Egypt. God gave Joseph favor with Pharaoh by giving him extraordinary wisdom as an interpreter of dreams and as a statesman (Alexander).

When a famine came, Joseph was in a position to deliver Israel. “Now a famine and great trouble came over all the land of Egypt and Canaan, and our fathers found no sustenance. But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first. And the second *time* Joseph was made known to his brothers, and Joseph’s family became known to the Pharaoh. Then Joseph sent and called his father Jacob and all his relatives to *him*, seventy-five people. So Jacob went down to Egypt; and he died, he and our fathers” (7:11-15). The story is straightforward. When famine came, Jacob sent his sons to Egypt. On the second visit, Joseph’s brothers realized who he was. Joseph was able to deliver his family from famine.

Stephen (and the Septuagint) says Joseph called 75 people (7:14). Wiersbe suggests the Septuagint includes Joseph’s grandchildren (1 Chron. 7:14-15, 20-25). The Hebrew text of Genesis 46:27 and Exodus 1:5 say 70 went to Egypt. One possible explanation is that Joseph called 75 (7:14), but only 70 actually made the trip (see Alexander). Another possibility is that the 75 omits Jacob and Joseph, including the remaining seven of Joseph’s nine sons (Marshall). Jacob and the fathers, the founders of the twelve tribes, all died in Egypt.

The patriarchs were buried in Israel “And they were carried back to Shechem and laid in the tomb that Abraham bought for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor, *the father* of Shechem” (7:16). This verse poses two problems. It sounds as if Stephen is saying Jacob was buried in Shechem and *Abraham* bought the tomb at Shechem. According to Genesis, Jacob was buried in the cave of Machpelah near *Hebron* (not Shechem), which Abraham had purchased from Ephron the Hittite (Gen. 49:29-32; 15:13) and Joseph was buried at Shechem (Josh. 24:32) in land which *Jacob* (not Abraham) bought from the sons of Hamor (Gen. 33:18-20).

The solution to the first problem is that Stephen is not saying that Jacob (7:15) was buried in Shechem. The word “they” (7:16) is a reference to the patricides (7:15) and does not include Jacob (Alexander; Toussaint; Wiersbe; Hodges, who says this may be the case). The Old Testament does not mention the burial place of the twelve patriarchs. Stephen is saying that they were buried in Shechem. There was a tradition at Shechem that the twelve sons of Jacob were buried there (Marshall).

Those who assume that Stephen is saying that Jacob was buried in Shechem claim that he telescoped the two purchases of land (John Wesley; F. F. Bruce; *The Ryrie Study Bible*). Wesley writes, “Stephen contracts these two purchases into one. This concise manner of speaking,

strange as it seems to us, was common among the Hebrews, particularly when, in a case notoriously known, the speaker mentioned but part of the story and left the rest, which would have interrupted the current of his discourse, to be supplied in the mind of the hearer.”

The solution to the second problem is that, in a sense, Abraham purchased the property in the person of his grandson Jacob (Toussaint), or Abraham actually purchased both pieces of property and Jacob later had to purchase the Shechem piece again (Wiersbe; Hodges). Hodges says there is no proof of a contradiction. Stephen could have been repeating traditional data that supplemented the data recorded in the Old Testament.

The message is that eleven of the twelve patriarchs betrayed the very one destined by God to deliver them from famine.

3. The people rejected Moses, their deliverer. Stephen narrates the story making many points but establishing one main message.

The people multiplied. “But when the time of the promise drew near which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt” (7:17). Over hundreds of years, the number of the Israelites grew to a sizable multitude.

The people were oppressed. “till another king arose who did not know Joseph” (7:18). So much time had lapsed since the time of Joseph that the current Egypt king did not know who Joseph was. Marshall thinks it is more likely that the Egyptian king preferred to forget about Joseph in the face of the menace of the growing might of the Israelites.

“This man dealt treacherously with our people, and oppressed our forefathers, making them expose their babies, so that they might not live” (7:19). The Pharaoh, who did not know Joseph, oppressed the Israelites, including making them kill their babies.

Moses was born. “At this time Moses was born, and was well-pleasing to God; and he was brought up in his father’s house for three months” (7:20). At the height of the cruel persecution of the Israelites (Alexander), Moses was born. Because of the situation (7:19), he only lived with his natural parents for three months.

“But when he was set out, Pharaoh’s daughter took him away and brought him up as her own son” (7:21). When Moses was placed in a basket in the Nile River, Pharaoh’s daughter found him and adopted him as her own son.

“And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds” (7:22). As the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, Moses had the opportunity to gain an Egyptian education, learning all the wisdom of the Egyptians. He distinguished himself in speech and in action (Bruce). Marshall suggests that we should attach much accuracy to Moses’ self-deprecation (Ex. 4:10), which was a little more in an attempt to avoid a task he did not wish to undertake.

Moses was rejected. “Now when he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel” (7:23). The Old Testament does not state that Moses was in the Egyptian court for forty years, but this agrees with an old Talmudic tradition (Alexander; Marshall). The fact that it came into his heart to visit his people suggests divine communication and “visit” implies attending to their interests (7:25; Alexander). The word choice implies that God planted the thought in Moses’ mind (Marshall).

“And seeing one of *them* suffer wrong, he defended and avenged him who was oppressed, and struck down the Egyptian” (7:24). When Moses saw one of his brethren being mistreated, he killed the Egyptian who was oppressing the Israelites.

“For he supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand” (7:25). Moses thought that surely his people would understand that God had called him to deliver his people, but they did not.

“And the next day he appeared to two of them as they were fighting, and *tried to* reconcile them, saying, ‘Men, you are brethren; why do you wrong one another?’ But he who did his neighbor wrong pushed him away, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? Do you want to kill me as you did the Egyptian yesterday?’” (7:26-28). The proof that they did not recognize Moses as the deliverer they expected (Alexander) is that the very next day, when he tried to reconcile two Israelites who were fighting, one of them wanted to know who made him a ruler and judge over them. He even accused Moses of wanting to kill them!

“Then, at this saying, Moses fled and became a dweller in the land of Midian, where he had two sons” (7:29). As a result of his rejection, Moses fled to Midian, where he fathered two sons.

Moses was called. “And when forty years had passed, an Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire in a bush, in the wilderness of Mount Sinai” (7:30). Moses spent forty years in Median. The expression “an Angel of the Lord” is a metaphorical way of speaking of the presence of God (Marshall).

“When Moses saw *it*, he marveled at the sight; and as he drew near to observe, the voice of the Lord came to him ‘*saying*, ‘I *am* the God of your fathers; the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ And Moses trembled and dared not look” (7:31-32). When Moses saw a bush burning without being consumed (Ex. 3:2), he walked toward it to get a better look. As he approached the bush, God spoke to him in an audible voice. Moses reverses the order of the statements in Exodus 3:5 so that the stress falls on the fact that the God of Moses’ ancestors is the One revealing Himself to Moses (Marshall).

“Then the LORD said to him, ‘Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground. I have surely seen the oppression of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their groaning and have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt’” (7:33-34). After God identified Himself, He instructed Moses to take off his sandals because he was on holy ground. Removing the sandals was an expression of reverence and awe and, probably symbolized the putting away of all purity to which the feet were exposed in walking (Alexander). Removing one’s shoes is a mark of respect to one’s host (Bruce).

God informs Moses that having seen the oppression of His people and hearing their groans, He is sending Moses to Egypt to deliver them.

Moses was rejected. “This Moses whom they rejected, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge?’ is the one God sent *to be* a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the Angel who appeared to him in the bush” (7:35). Beginning with this verse, the word “this” is repeated three times (7:35, 37, 38). This literary device emphasizes the magnitude of the man they rejected (see Peter’s use of “this Jesus” in 2:23, 32, 36). They rejected the one God sent to be their deliverer! As in the case of Joseph, they rejected him the first time but accepted him the second time. Bruce says the implied parallel with the rejection of Jesus is too plain to require elaboration (see also Marshall). The Greek word rendered “deliverer” means “redeemer, deliverer.” Actually, God is rebuking the disobedient Israelites by sending the same man they taunted for his aspiration to be a national liberator and protector (Alexander). This Moses, the very one God appointed as a leader and redeemer, is the one the Israelites rejected.

Moses delivered them. “He brought them out, after he had shown wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness forty years” (7:36). Indeed, God did use Moses to deliver Israel from Egyptian slavery, and He did it with signs and wonders. There is, no

doubt, a subtle reference here to the fact that Jesus (2:22), the apostles (2:43; 4:30; 5:12), and even Stephen (6:8) had performed signs and wonders. This marks the third period of forty years in the life of Moses (7:23).

The Red Sea is a gulf between Arabia and Africa that is 1400 miles long. Moses led the Children of Israel across the Northern end of the Red Sea (Ex. 14:21-22). The traditional spot is at Bahr al Kolsum. The ancient Christian historian Orosius said that the traces of chariot wheels were still visible in his day (Alexander). Paulus Orosius (385-420 AD), a disciple of Augustine, was a historian and theologian.

Moses promised a Prophet. “This is that Moses who said to the children of Israel, ‘The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear’” (7:37). For the second time, Stephen uses the word “this.” They rejected the one who prophesied that the Lord would raise up a Prophet Israel would hear. This is a reference to Deuteronomy 18:15, which is a prophecy of the coming of the Messiah (Peter’s use of the passage in 3:22). Stephen let the Sanhedrin draw the inference that Jesus is the Messiah and they, not he, dishonored Moses (Alexander). Rackham points out that Moses’ work was not final. It was preparatory. God would raise a greater prophet.

Moses received the Law. “This is he who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the Angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and *with* our fathers, the one who received the living oracles to give to us” (7:38). For the third time, Stephen uses the word “this.” They rejected the one who was not only with the congregation of Israel in the wilderness but also received the Law given through the “divine Angel” (Alexander).

Moses was rejected. “Whom our fathers would not obey, but rejected. And in their hearts they turned back to Egypt, saying to Aaron, ‘Make us gods to go before us; *as for* this Moses who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him’” (7:39-40). The fathers disobeyed and rejected Moses. They did not physically return to Egypt, but they did return in their thoughts and desires (Alexander), which is evident by what they said to Aaron.

The people worshipped an idol. “And they made a calf in those days, offered sacrifices to the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands” (7:41). They not only disobeyed Moses and rejected him, but they also worshipped an idol, which was a work of their own hands, not a God who made them as a work of His hands. This is as bad as it gets. Idolatry is the ultimate sin.

God gave them up to idols. “Then God turned and gave them up to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the Prophets: ‘Did you offer Me slaughtered animals and sacrifices *during* forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? You also took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, images which you made to worship; and I will carry you away beyond Babylon’” (7:42-43). When they choose to worship idols, God gave them up to idols. To support the statement that God gave the Exodus generation over to idols, Stephen cites the book of the Prophets. The expression “the book of the Prophets” refers to the twelve Minor Prophets, reckoned as a single volume in the Jewish canon or as the second great division of the Hebrew Scriptures (Alexander). Stephen quotes Amos 5:26-27. He changes “beyond Damascus” to “beyond Babylon,” giving words from Amos the sense of the whole prophetic message. He uses the specific words of Amos to generalize biblical content (Hodges).

Stephen charges that in the wilderness, the children of Israel sacrificed to the Lord and worshipped Moloch, the god of the Ammonites (1 Kings 11:7). They took up his tabernacle! According to the Rabbis, Moloch was a brazen image with outstretched arms. When heated, children were thrown into the image as an offering and burned alive (Alexander; see Marshall). This practice was prohibited in the Mosaic Law (Lev. 18:21; 20:2; Deut. 12:31; 18:10) but was

practiced in the valley of Hinnom on the south side of Jerusalem (1 Kings 11:7; 2 Kings 23:10; see Alexander). In addition, they worshiped Remphan. Bruce says that Remphan is another name for Saturn. As a result of their long history of idolatry, God gave them up to idolatry and allowed them to be carried into captivity in Babylon.

The message is Israel rejected the two individuals who were their deliverers.

The Limitation of the Temple “Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as He appointed, instructing Moses to make it according to the pattern that he had seen, which our fathers, having received it in turn, also brought with Joshua into the land possessed by the Gentiles, whom God drove out before the face of our fathers until the days of David, who found favor before God and asked to find a dwelling for the God of Jacob. But Solomon built Him a house” (7:44-47). God gave the fathers the Tabernacle of witness and they had it in the wilderness and in the land until the time of David. The Tabernacle was the “tent of testimony” because it housed the tablets of the Law (Bruce). The wording “find” a dwelling for the God of Jacob is from Psalm 132:5 (Marshall). The Tabernacle was replaced with the Temple. Salomon built the Temple.

“However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says, ‘Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. What house will you build for Me? says the LORD, Or what is the place of My rest? Has My hand not made all these things?’” (7:48-50). Stephen goes on to say that God does not dwell in man-made buildings and he quotes Isaiah 66:1-2. Isaiah speaks of a time when God would no longer dwell in temples but in human hearts.

Stephen shows the Temple’s temporary nature and implies the Mosaic system’s temporary nature (see Alexander). He also pointed out the rejection of Israel’s history (7:9, 35, 39). Bruce says, “As for the charge of subverting the Mosaic tradition, it is not he but the nation, and preeminently its leaders, that should plead guilty to this: their guilt is amply attested by their own sacred scriptures, back to Moses’ own lifetime. As to the charge of blaspheming God by announcing the supersession of the temple by ‘this Jesus of Nazareth,’ he makes no attempt to deny it but justifies his position by claiming that is the position occupied by the patriarchs and prophets, whereas the position of his opponent involves a point-blank denial of the consistent business of the scriptures.”

The Resistance of the Religious Leaders “You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you” (7:51). Stephen abruptly charges the religious leader of his day with resisting the Holy Spirit, just like their ancestors throughout Israel’s history. They were stiff-necked, like an ox refusing to receive a yoke. They were uncircumcised, that is, they heard and thought like Gentiles (Alexander). Their will and understanding were hardened against the revelation of God (Rackham). They were circumcised in the literal sense, but their own unresponsiveness and resistance to God’s revelation were such as might have been expected from Gentiles (Bruce). In the Old Testament, circumcision was used metaphorically to cut away the pride and sinfulness of the heart (Lev. 26:41; Deut. 10:16; Jer. 4:4; see Marshall). “Their ears did not hear the truth, the heart did not receive the truth, and their necks did not bow to the truth” (Wiersbe). They also resisted the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is regarded as speaking through the prophets and now through the spirit-filled apostles (Marshall). The Greek word translated “resist” is a compound word consisting of the two words “against” and “to fall down or from.” It means “To strive against, resist.”

“Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers” (7:52). Stephen gets more specific. He charges the religious leaders with not only persecuting the

prophets who foretold the coming of the Messiah but of actually being the ones who betrayed and murdered the Messiah. The Old Testament does not record the martyrdom of many prophets, but there were many traditions pertaining to the fate of the prophets (Rackham; Marshall).

“Who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it” (7:53).

Moreover, they are the ones who received the Law and did not keep it. The Old Testament does not mention that God used angels as His intermediaries in giving the Law at Mount Sinai. It was, however, part of the Jewish tradition (Marshall) and is mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament (Gal. 3:19; Heb. 2:2).

The religious leaders charged that Stephen had spoken blasphemous words against this holy place and the Law (6:13). Stephen says they, like their forefathers, are the ones who have resisted God and not kept the Law and the Temple is only temporary. Why do little leopards have spots? Answer: they come from big leopards that have spots.

The Reaction

***Sanhedrin* “When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth” (7:54).** The religious leaders felt the sting of Stephen’s accusation. They growled at him. The expression “gnashing teeth” was a sign of rage (Marshall).

***Steven* “But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God and said, ‘Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!’” (7:55-56).** On the other hand, Stephen remained calm (Bruce), being filled with the Holy Spirit. He saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God and he said so. Stephen began his speech concerning “the God of glory” (7:2) and, at the end, he saw the glory of God. This is the only occurrence of the phrase “the Son of Man” outside the Gospels and the only time it is uttered by someone other than Jesus (Bruce). The right hand of God is the position of honor and co-equal power (Alexander). The significance of Jesus standing instead of sitting has been explained as He is the Mediator between God and man (Rackham). He was ready to assist or meet Stephen (Alexander; Rackham; Bruce) and to be both an advocate to plead Steven’s case before God and welcome him into God’s presence (Marshall).

***Stoning* “Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord” (7:57).** Spontaneously, the religious leaders screened aloud, cupped their hands over their ears, and ran toward Stephen. For Stephen to speak the way he did was blasphemy to Jewish ears; the religious leaders were shouting down the blasphemy and covering their ears so that they might not hear any more of it (Marshall).

“And they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul” (7:58). Furthermore, they cast him out of the city and stoned him. The executioners divested themselves of their clothes to perform their function more easily (Marshall). They placed their flowing upper garments at the feet of the young man, Saul, who was destined to become Paul, the apostle. Thus, Stephen is the connecting link between Peter and Paul, an “indispensable link to the chain” (Rackham).

“And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit’” (7:59). As Stephen was being stoned, he prayed that the Lord would receive his spirit. The prayer is an imitation of the Lord’s prayer on the cross (Lk. 23:46). The fact that he asked the Son to do what the Son asked the Father to do proves that he addressed the Son as a divine person (Alexander; see also Marshall).

“Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lord, do not charge them with this sin’ and when he had said this, he fell asleep” (7:60). Stephen’s last prayer is a copy of the Lord’s prayer on the cross (Lk 23:34). Stephen illustrates denouncing sin and disobedience and at the same time having personal concern for them (Marshall).

In 1948, Jim Elliot, who later became a martyr, wrote in his journal, “I seek not a long life, but a full one, like you were Jesus.” Two years later, he wrote, “I must not think it strange if God takes in youth those whom I would have kept on earth until they were older. God is peopling eternity, and I must not restrict Him to old men and women.”

Scattering “Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles” (8:1). Unfortunately, there is a chapter break at this point. Alexander calls it “one of the most striking instances of carelessness or want of judgment in the division of the chapters and verses.” Saul, who later became the Apostle Paul, consented to the stoning of Stephen. After the stoning of Stephen, great persecution fell on the church at Jerusalem. As a result of the persecution, the believers in Jerusalem were scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria.

Luke says *all* were scattered except the apostles. It has been suggested that “all” refers to just the Hellenist portion of Jerusalem, of which Stephen had been a leader (Bruce; Wiersbe). The fact that the apostles could stay in Jerusalem with others confirms this suggestion (Marshall).

Stephen’s death was the signal for a campaign of repression of the Jerusalem church (Bruce; Marshall). Here, Luke says that Jerusalem was scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Later, he adds that they went even further than that (11:19).

Burial “And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him” (8:2). Devout believers buried Stephen’s body and greatly grieved at his funeral. The Greek word translated “lamentation” means “beating the head or breast, lamentation.” It is an allusion to the ancient practice of beating the breast as a sign of mourning (Alexander). These pious men were also brave. The fact that there was great persecution indicates that it was dangerous for them to bury Stephen (Marshall). Yet they did it anyway.

Saul “As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison” (8:3). In the meantime, Saul himself made havoc of the church. The Greek word rendered “havoc” means “outrage, maltreat, defile.” Saul went from house to house, arresting both men and women and having them incarcerated. He laid waste the church like a savage animal, like soldiers who had stormed a city (Rackham). He compelled them to deny the faith (26:11). When they did not, he had even the women beaten (22:19) unto death (22:4). Realizing the fundamental incompatibility between the old order and the new one, Saul saw no compromise between the two if the old order was to be preserved; the new must be stamped out (Bruce).

Preaching “Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word” (8:4). All of these things, the scattering of the church, the burial of Stephen, and the persecution of Saul, were going on at the same time or nearly at the same time (Alexander). The conclusion (“therefore”) is that those scattered preached the Word everywhere they went. The first missionary work was spontaneous, not organized under the official leadership of the apostle or the church (Rackham). Actually, Luke records what became of Stephen and Saul and resumes the narrative, repeating what he said in Acts 8:1, adding that as they were scattered, they spread the Word (Alexander).

Martyrs create faith; faith does not create martyrs (Miguel de Unamuno, 1864-1936). Persecution can be used for the glory of God and the good of believers if responded to in a godly manner. “Persecution does to the church what wind does to seed: it scatters it and only produces a greater harvest” (Wiersbe).

Summary: When the religious leaders did not like the message of Stephen, they stoned him and, as a result of the persecution that followed, believers were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria and as they went, they preached the Word. As believers scattered, the Word of God spread.

For a discussion of the problems in Stephen’s speech and inerrancy, see Rex Koivisto, “Stephen’s Speech: A Case Study in Rhetoric and Biblical Inerrancy” (*JETS*, 20, Dec. 1977, pp. 353-364).

From Stephen’s point of view, the lessons are: trust God and be bold. God will use you. From the point of view of the Sanhedrin, the lessons include listening to the message of God. If the message applies to you, assume your responsibility.

Don’t shoot the messenger. The Stephen principle is that when people do not like the message, they shoot the messenger! In ancient times, messages were delivered in person. During the war, the messenger was sent into the enemy camp. A provoked General receiving a message he did not like could retaliate on the messenger. Sophocles wrote, “No one loves the messenger who brings bad news.” The expression, “Don’t shoot the messenger,” was first used by Shakespeare in *Henry IV*. A similar expression, “Don’t shoot the piano player; he’s doing the best he can,” originated around 1860 in the Wild West. During his 1883 tour of the United States, Oscar Wilde saw this saying on a notice in a Leadville, Colorado saloon. This phrase is sometimes attributed to Mark Twain, but neither Wilde nor Twain ever claimed authorship.

The teen, whose parents found drugs in his room, says, “What were you doing in my room?” The man yells at the scale. The lady who is told she has six months to live complains for six months about the way the doctor gave her the information.

In one episode of *Seinfeld*, George did something for which he should have been fired. The boss called him into his office. He asked George if he was guilty. When it came out that George was, the boss calmly said, “George, you are fired.” George replied, “You didn’t have to say it like that.”

Many years ago, while visiting America, a wealthy Chinese businessman was fascinated by a powerful microscope. Looking through its lens to study crystals and the petals of flowers, he was amazed at their beauty and detail. So, he decided to purchase one of these devices and take it back to China. He thoroughly enjoyed using it until one day, he examined some rice he planned to eat for dinner. Much to his dismay, he discovered that tiny living creatures were crawling in it. He wondered what to do since he was especially fond of this staple food in his daily diet. Finally, he concluded that there was only one way out of his dilemma—he would destroy the instrument that caused him to discover the distasteful fact! So he smashed the microscope to pieces. When you do not assume responsibility and you shoot the messenger, you not only hurt the messenger, you hurt yourself.

THINKING STRAIGHT

Have you ever heard someone talk and thought, “This person is not thinking straight?” That is what God thinks when He listens to us. His thoughts are higher than our thoughts (Is. 55:9). The whole process of spiritual growth is transformed by renewing our minds (Rom. 12:2). In Acts, Simon is an illustration of wrong thinking and its consequences. What can we learn from a case study of a wrong-headed fellow?

Philip’s Ministry

Preaching “Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them” (8:5). The majority of Greek manuscripts do not have the article “the” before the word “city.” In other words, the Majority Greek text says “a city of Samaria” (the article is in the Critical Text). Nevertheless, it could be the city of Samaria, the capital. Philip either went to *a city in the province* of Samaria (see Alexander for a detailed defense) or *the city* of Samaria (Rackham; Bruce). This is like people today saying they went to New York, which can refer either to the city or the state. The town’s identification is not significant to the story (Marshall).

The Samaritans are a link in the transition of the gospel, going from the Jews to the Gentiles (Alexander). Jesus told the disciples to go to Samaria (1:8) and, as a result of the martyrdom of Stephen, they were scattered into Samaria (8:1). There was a long-standing cleavage between the Jews of Judea and the half-breeds of Samaria (see Barclay for details). The Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans (Jn. 4:9). According to Bruce, the cleavage was widened when the Samaritans were refused a share in rebuilding the Temple at Jerusalem and instead erected a rival temple on Mount Gerizim. The Jews and the Samaritans shared a hope for the coming of a deliverer (Jn. 4:25). John the Baptist and Jesus had ministered to the Samaritans (Jn. 3:23). Philip preached Christ to the Samaritans, that is, he preached that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah (Alexander).

“And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did” (8:6). The healing confirmed his message (Rackham; Marshall).

Healing “For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed” (8:7). Luke explains the miracles that Philip performed. He cast out demons and healed paralyzed and lame people. Philip declared God’s Word and demonstrated God’s power (Wiersbe).

“And there was great joy in that city” (8:8). As a result of the healings and the conversions, there was great joy in the city where Philip preached. When God works, there is joy. As the Psalmist says, “You will show me the path of life; in Your presence *is* fullness of joy; at Your right hand *are* pleasures forevermore” (Ps. 16:11).

Simon’s Misunderstanding

Simon’s Past “But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great” (8:9).

Simon's sorcery amazed the people and gave him a platform to claim that he was great. The greatness is not a reference to being merely distinguished but to something supernatural (Alexander). Rackham says there was a demand for religious teachers to heal the diseases of the spirit and mind as well as the body, to open the channels to the spirit world, that is, give people knowledge of God. The mixture of Greek philosophy and oriental religion produced various characters, including exorcists, healers, wonder-workers, and sometimes astrologers and spiritualists. Some tried to be philosophers or moral teachers, while others claimed to be prophets with divine inspiration (see Barclay).

"to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, 'This man is the great power of God'" (8:10). Everyone in town thought he was the great power of God, that is, that he was a divine person or at least an emanation from God (Alexander). After the close of the New Testament, writers said he claimed to be the Logos, the Messiah, the Samaritan Archangel, and the Power of God personified. Jerome says he claimed, "I am the Word of God, I am the Paraclete, I am the Almighty, I am the whole of God," but Alexander says this is probably a figment of later origin.

"And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time" (8:11). Simon's sorcery impressed them for so long that they listened to what he said.

Simon's Conversion **"But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized" (8:12).** Then, Philip came to town preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God and Jesus Christ. Rackham calls the kingdom of God the kingship of Christ. The people believed Philip, which means they believed what he said about the kingdom of God and Jesus Christ. Those who believed were baptized. Unlike Judaism, Philip baptized both men and women (Alexander).

"Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done" (8:13). Simon believed and was baptized, but most commentators conclude that Simon was not genuinely converted because of what he tried to do later (8:19) and because of what Peter said to him (8:20-23; Calvin, Alexander; Rackham; Bruce; Marshall). Rackham says he believed Philip (8:12). Bruce describes Simon's faith as superficial and inadequate.

The text, however, plainly says Simon believed. According to Paul, if a person believes, he is saved (Acts 16:30-31). That, and that alone, should settle the issue. Furthermore, Luke says, "Simon himself *also* believed." Inglis, a nineteenth-century author, wrote, "The word 'also' in the statement links Simon's faith with that of the Samaritans; and they, we read, 'believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ.' And if you explain away that as other than true faith, you make the Gospel itself of no effect and undermine the whole foundation of faith. Of what value are any of the promises to faith or any of the records of faith if the testimony before us does not mean that Simon believed to the saving of his soul?" (Inglis, p. 52). Philip thought Simon was saved. He baptized him! As Inglis says, "Language could not be more explicit: 'Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.'" *The NKJV Study Bible* says, "Verse 13 indicates that Simon was a believer."

Simon's Confusion **"Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them" (8:14).** The apostles heard that the Samaritans received the Word of God, that is, they believed and obeyed what God said (Alexander). Consequently, they sent Peter and John to Samaria.

“Who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit” (8:15-17). Whether Simon received the Holy Spirit is not clearly stated but is implied from what is said here (Marshall). Receiving the Holy Spirit after conversion is the exception, not the rule. All the exceptions (Acts 8 and 19) were during the transition period from Law to Grace. Bruce says, “In general, it seems to be assumed throughout the New Testament that those who believe and are baptized also have the Spirit of God. If so, why did Peter and John lay hands on the Samaritans before they received the Holy Spirit? Marshall says, “God withheld the Spirit until the coming of Peter and John so that the Samaritans might be seen as fully incorporated into the community of Jerusalem Christians who had received the Spirit at Pentecost.” Wiersbe agrees, “God wanted to unite the Samaritan believers with the original Jewish church in Jerusalem.”

“And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money saying, ‘Give e this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit’” (8:18-19). Rackham says there must have been some external indication, such as speaking in tongues, that they had received the Holy Spirit. Marshall says there is no proof of that and other less spectacular indications, such as joy, may have been a sufficient indication of the presence of the Spirit. Whether or not the external signs were speaking in tongues, they were so impressive that Simon craved the power to reproduce them (Bruce). So when Simon saw what Peter and John had done, he offered them money to give him the power to do it.

Marshall comments, “The very thought of obtaining a divine gift by some kind of payment betrays a total misunderstanding of the nature of God and his gifts. We may be able to sympathize with Simon to some extent; coming straight out of paganism as he did, he could easily misunderstand the new religion that had attracted him. But the misunderstanding he had was serious and had to be nipped in the bud. To think in this way shows that Simon’s fundamental attitudes were out of harmony with those of God.”

Simon’s Correction “But Peter said to him, “Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money!” (8:20). Earlier, Peter and John were unable to give money (3:6); this time, they refused to accept any (Bruce). Peter told Simon because he thought the gift of God could be purchased with money, his money would perish with him, usually interpreted that Peter told him he was going to hell (Marshall).

The Greek noun translated “perish” means “destruction, waste, loss, perishing.” It comes from a Greek verb that means “to destroy, kill, lose utterly, perish,” which is used *figuratively* for the loss of eternal life (A-S). Note these words are not technical terms for eternal punishment. They can refer to either temporal or eternal destruction. They are used for everything from wasting oil (Mt. 26:8) to eternal perishing (Jn. 3:16). Therefore, the use of this word does not necessarily mean that Peter was threatening Simon with eternal damnation. The word “perish” can describe something that could happen to a believer. Lang argues that out of the nearly 90 times the verb form of this noun is used, only 11 are clearly a reference to hell. It is used 33 times for the death of the body (Lang; see Mt. 2:13). In the context of Acts 8, the perishing of money is temporal. Therefore, Simon’s perishing is the temporal perishing of physical death (Dillow, pp. 327-28). Inglis observes, “If his money and he were to perish together, the word cannot be stretched beyond a temporal calamity” (Inglis, p. 48). Remember Ananias and Sapphira (5:1-11). In Hebrews 11:39, the word unmistakable refers to the physical death of believers. The writer identifies himself with his readers (“we”) as those who draw back to

perdition, that is, destruction, the same word that appears in Acts 8:20. Those who draw back are in danger of a premature physical death (1 Cor. 11:30). Hebrews 11:39 proves that *believers* (“we”) can “perish,” but that does not mean they go to hell.

Paul says, “But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and *into* many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition” (1 Tim. 6:9). The context of this verse indicates that Paul is speaking about believers who fall into the temptation of a desire to be rich. The Greek word translated “destruction” comes from the verb “to destroy” and means “ruin, destruction, death.” The one for “perdition” means “destruction, waste, loss, perishing.” It is used in Acts 8:20. It is generally assumed that the first of these words is a reference to the ruin of the body and the second to a loss of the soul in eternity (Hiebert; Gromacki). That is not necessarily the case. Perhaps the second is “more intense” than the first (Kent). Both words are “probably” used “in the sense of ruin,” suggesting “irretrievable loss” (Guthrie; see also Hendriksen). Gromacki says “destruction” involves “emotional and mental disorders, bankruptcy, and family loss.” He believes that “perdition” refers to the future life, but if it applies only to this life, it is a “terrible waste of time and effort.”

In Luke 13, some told Jesus about “the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices” (Lk. 13:1). Jesus replied, “And Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all *other* Galileans because they suffered such things? I tell you, no; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish’” (Lk. 13:2-3). Notice the Galileans suffered physical death and Jesus said that those who did not repent would *likewise perish*. The implication of that phrase seems to be that they would suffer physical death.

Part of Jesus’s reply was a parable concerning a fig tree (Lk. 13:6-9). The parable continues the previous warning to repent (Plummer). It fits “exceptionally well” with what has just been said (Geldenhuys). It is common for a commentator to conclude that the fig tree represents Israel (Godet; Creed; Geldenhuys) and that it is predicting physical death. Barclay says, “But Jesus went on to say that if his hearers did not repent, they too would perish. What did he mean? One thing is clear—he foresaw and foretold the destruction of Jerusalem, which happened in A.D. 70 (cp. Luke 21:21–24). He knew well that if the Jews went on with their intrigues, their rebellions, their plottings, and their political ambitions, they were simply going to commit national suicide; he knew that in the end Rome would step in and obliterate the nation, and that is precisely what happened.” In other words, “perish,” in Luke 13:3, the verb form of the noun used in Acts 8:20, means physical death.

“You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God” (8:21). “In this matter” has been interpreted to mean “no part in this salvation” (Alexander), but Peter is telling Simon that he would have neither part nor portion in giving the Holy Spirit because his heart was not right with God.

“Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you” (8:22). Paul concluded by telling Simon that he should repent and pray that God would forgive him his thoughts. The Greek word translated “repent” means “to change one’s mind.” Notice Peter did not tell him that his *actions* were wrong but that the *thoughts* of his heart needed to be forgiven. Repentance is a change of mind.

“For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity” (8:23). Peter explains (“for”) that Simon’s heart was poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity. Believers can be bitter (Eph. 4:31) and be bound by sin (Rom. 6:12; 7:23). Inglis makes the interesting observation that the bitterness and bond of iniquity “describe not the state in which Simon committed the sin, but the mood in which he received the rebuke; for ‘bitterness’ elsewhere

evidently means irritation or displeasure, and the gall of bitterness would signify the heat of displeasure which brought the scowl upon his countenance and showed that the influence under which he had sinned was not yet dissolved” (Inglis, p. 52).

Simon’s Compliance “Then Simon answered and said, ‘Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me’” (8:24). Simon requested Peter pray that he not perish (8:20). Luke does not record what happened to Simon. The implication is that he repented, They prayed for him, and he was not judged.

There is a tradition that Simon was the first false teacher. Rackham says Justin Martyr, a native of Samaria who lived a hundred years after this event, was the first informant. Justin said that Simon was a native of Gittho, a city in Samaria, that the Samaritans worshiped him and went to Rome in the reign of Claudius (41-54), where the Senate erected a statute to him as a god. In 1574, a statue was found bearing the dedication to a Sabine god, *Semoni Sanco Deo Fidio*. Rackham adds that unfamiliar with Latin, Justin interprets the inscription as “To Simon, the holy son of God” and further erroneously attributes Simon to the fully developed doctrine of Gnosticism in his own day. Rackham concludes that it is extremely probable that Simon did not repent, but having lost his reputation or at least his influence in Samaria, he went to Rome. Bruce points out that Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* 1.16) claims that Simon was the source of Gnosticism and that the Simonian sect was derived from him. While Bruce acknowledges that some scholars do not think that the Simon of Acts and the Simon of the Gnostic sect of the Simonians were the same person, he says that it is more probable that they were.

Marshall correctly observes that Luke’s story suggests nothing of the later legend. Observing that there is no consensus concerning which sources can be relied on for information about Simonism, Meek concludes, “The quest for the historical Simon (and Helena!) is even less promising than the quest for the historical Jesus” (Meeks, p. 141).

Hodges says Simon is presented in this passage as repentant and seeking prayer. If the apostles honored his request, the outcome is “most hopeful.” Hodges points out that Luke recorded the story long after it occurred. His conclusion is strange if he knew that Simon had become a notorious apostate. Hodges concludes that he expects to meet Simon in heaven.

“So when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans” (8:25). On their way back to Jerusalem, Peter and John preached the gospel in many of the villages of Samaria.

Summary: Although Simon was saved, he still thought like an unsaved person. Conversion does not correct all the wrong ways we think. Repentance, a change of mind, is needed after conversion.

Bruce captures the spirit of this passage when he says, “Simon had believed Philip’s message and had been baptized, but he still manifested the signs of his old unregenerate nature.” Bruce says that it is doubtful that Simon had experienced the grace of God in any real sense, but what he says applies to believers.

Marshall notes that the story indicates the possibility of forgiveness, even for serious sins commended by a baptized person.

We need to think straight about money. To paraphrase another, money may buy power with men, but not the power of God. Money may buy advancement with men but not with recognition with God. Money can buy libraries, but it cannot buy insight or wisdom. Money can buy entertainment, but it cannot buy joy. Money can buy medicine, but it cannot buy health. Money can buy a house, but it cannot buy a home.

We need to think straight about ministry. We think the church is a building. The service is conducted with people sitting in pews with a pastor standing behind a pulpit. Believers are the church. Believers are ministers. The service is you serving others. Many believers sit in church saying, feed me, like a baby bird sitting in a nest with its mouth open, waiting for the mother bird to drop in a worm.

We need to think straight about the Messiah. We are like Simon. We think we are great (8:9). We think it is all about me. In 1715, King Louis XIV of France died after a reign of 72 years. He had called himself “the Great” and was the monarch who made the famous statement, “I am the state!” His court was the most magnificent in Europe, and his funeral was equally spectacular. As his body lay in a golden coffin, orders were given that the cathedral should be very dimly lit, with only a special candle set above his coffin to dramatize his greatness. At the memorial, thousands waited in hushed silence. Then, Bishop Massillon began to speak; slowly reaching down, he snuffed out the candle and said, “Only God is great.”

There are many other things about which we do not think straight. We emphasized the external instead of the internal. We focus on feeling good and looking good rather than being good. We are bent on getting ahead of others instead of serving others.

A group of alumni, highly established in their careers, visited their old university professor. The conversation soon turned into complaints about stress in general and work in particular. Offering his guests coffee, the professor went to the kitchen and returned with a large pot of coffee and an assortment of cups: porcelain, plastic, glass, crystal, some plain looking, some expensive, some exquisite-telling them to help themselves to the coffee.

When all the students had a cup of coffee in hand, the professor said: “If you noticed, all the nice looking expensive cups were taken up, leaving behind the plain and cheap ones. While it is normal for you to want only the best for yourselves, that is the source of your problems and stress. Be assured that the cup itself adds no quality to the coffee. In most cases, it is just more expensive and, in some cases, even hides what we drink. All of you wanted coffee, not the cup, but you consciously went for the best cups.

“Then you began eyeing each other’s cups. Now consider this: Life is the coffee, and the jobs, money, and societal position are the cups. They are just tools to hold and contain life, and the type of cup we have does not define nor change the quality of life we live. Sometimes, by concentrating only on the cup, we fail to enjoy the coffee God has provided us. God brews the coffee, not the cups. Enjoy your coffee! The happiest people don’t have the best of everything. They make the best of everything. Live simply. Love generously. Care deeply. Speak kindly. Leave the rest to God. Life should be measured in memories, not years.”

LOOK FOR AN ETHIOPIAN

Has a non-Christian ever asked you to explain something in the Bible? Are you apprehensive that might happen, so you are not as vocal as you might otherwise be? In the book of Acts, Philip was asked to explain a passage in the Old Testament. We can learn a lot from how he handled it.

The Setting

Philip “Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, ‘Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.’ This is desert” (8:26). An angel told Philip to “arise.” Alexander suggests that if the angel communicated to Philip in a dream, “arise,” he meant to arise from sleep or out of bed (Mt. 2:13, 14, 20, 21, where it means “awake”). He concludes that without such indication, it means “address yourself to action.” The angel told Philip to leave Samaria and go to the road between Jerusalem and Gaza. Luke says such a place was desert as if to say Philip was not likely to encounter travelers there (Alexander).

The Ethiopian “So he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship” (8:27). Philip did as he was told. The Greek word translated “behold” denotes something unexpected (Alexander). The Ethiopian was the treasurer from Ethiopia, modern Sudan (Marshall). He was a high-ranking official under Candace, the queen. The word Candace was the title of the queen of Meroe, an island belonging to Ethiopia (Alexander; Rackham). The Ethiopian was also a eunuch, a term that normally indicates castration (Marshall). The Mosaic Law excluded eunuchs from practicing the Jewish religious rites (Deut. 23:1). The fact that the Ethiopian had come to Jerusalem to worship indicates that he was at least a God-fearer (Marshall), a proselyte to Judaism, or a foreign Jew (Alexander). God-fearers attended the synagogue and read the Scriptures; proselytes were circumcised (Barclay). The Ethiopian had traveled 200 miles to worship at Jerusalem (Wiersbe).

“was returning. And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet” (8:28). Philip saw the Ethiopian reading Isaiah in his chariot. He was reading out loud, which was the custom of the day (Alexander; Rackham; Marshall). The words were written with no space between the letters and no punctuation. Thus, they had to be spelled out, which was done aloud (Bruce).

The Question

The Question of Philip “Then the Spirit said to Philip, ‘Go near and overtake this chariot’” (8:29). The Holy Spirit told Philip to approach the chariot. This was probably done with audible words.

“So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’” (8:30). The chariot of the Ethiopian was an ox-drawn wagon, moving at a walking pace so that Philip could have run alongside it (Marshall). As Philip approached the chariot, he heard the Ethiopian reading and asked if he understood what he was reading. Perhaps something in his voice indicated he was struggling with understanding.

The Question of Ethiopian “And he said, ‘How can I, unless someone guides me? And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him’ (8:31). The Ethiopian responded that he could not understand what he was reading unless someone were to guide him, a figure of speech for instruction (Alexander, who cites Mt. 15:14; Lk. 6:39; Jn. 16:13) or teacher (Rackham). He needed an interpreter (Bruce; Marshall).

This may sound strange to us, but it happens even today. One author writes, “Ian Thomas tells of getting on an airplane and being so tired that he planned just to curl up and sleep, but he heard a “psssst” and another “psssst.” Looking toward the sound, he heard a man say, “I am reading in the Bible about Nicodemus in John 3, and I do not understand it. Do you know anything about the Bible?” (Hughes). Many believers have had people ask them about something in the Bible. If it happened to you, would you be ready?

The Sermon

The Scripture “The place in the Scripture which he read was this: ‘He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and as a lamb before its shearer *is* silent, So He opened not His mouth. In His humiliation His justice was taken away, and who will declare His generation? For His life is taken from the earth’” (8:32-33). Luke pauses the narrative to explain that the Ethiopian was reading Isaiah 53:7-8, a passage that describes “the suffering of an innocent and unresisting victim” (Alexander). It is the “great prophecy of the atonement” (Rackham). Marshall says this passage “refers to a Servant of God who suffers the humiliation of all kinds and bears the consequences of the sins of others; he thus makes some kind of atonement for their sins and is finally exalted by God.” He adds that the particular verses cited are obscure; they describe the Servant remaining silent. It is safe to assume that Philip preached the cross and the resurrection of Jesus (Lk. 24:44-47; Acts 2:22-32; etc.; Hughes). The fact that Philip said more than just explain the verses cited is hinted at in verse 35 and is apparent from the fact that the Ethiopian asked for baptism (Marshall).

The Question “So the eunuch answered Philip and said, ‘I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?’” (8:34). The Ethiopian wanted to know if the passage in Isaiah was a reference to Isaiah or some other person. It has been suggested that the Ethiopian had heard this passage expound at Jerusalem (Alexander).

The Sermon “Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him” (8:35). Philip began with the passage the eunuch was reading. The expression “opened his mouth” implies a regular discourse distinguished from a simple conversation (Alexander; see also Marshall). He, no doubt, preached the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The man who led me to Christ points out it is not just that Christ died. The thieves died beside Him. It is not just that He died for us. Soldiers die for us. It is that He died for *our sins*. He was our substitute.

A young minister called to a church in a college town was concerned about the criticism he might encounter. He sought counsel from his father. “Dad,” he said, “I’m afraid if I mention anything about geology, there’s a professor in the congregation who has forgotten more about geology than I’ll ever know. If I use an illustration from Roman mythology, one with a doctor’s degree in that field will catch me on some inaccuracy. If I mention something in English literature, I’ll feel inferior in the presence of a learned woman who teaches that subject. What shall I do?” His father replied, “Son, just do what the Lord commands. Preach the gospel! Your critics will probably know very little about that!”

The Baptism

The Question “Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, ‘See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?’” (8:36). After finishing his discourse, they continued traveling together through the desert. Eventually, they came to an oasis. When the Ethiopian saw the water, he wanted to know what would prevent Philip from baptizing him, which indicates that the Ethiopian had heard about believer’s baptism either at Jerusalem or from Philip (Wiersbe).

The Answer “Then Philip said, ‘If you believe with all your heart, you may’ And he answered and said, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God’” (8:37). This verse is not in the Critical Greek Text, nor is it in the Majority Text. It is, however, in the *Textus Receptus*. Pointing out that Cyprian and Irenaeus quote it, Alexander concludes that the scale is tipped in favor of the *Received Text*. C. I. Scofield omitted this verse.

Irenaeus (115?-202) says, “[Philip declared] that this was Jesus, and that the Scripture was fulfilled in Him; as did also the believing eunuch himself” and, immediately requesting to be baptized, he said, ‘I believe Jesus Christ to be the Son of God’” (*Irenaeus, Against Heresies*, 3.12.8; <https://files.romanroadsstatic.com/materials/romans/early-christianity/IrenaeusV1-0.pdf>).

Pickering says, “The addition appears in 18 slightly different forms [the name ‘Philip’ appears in eleven MSS or 2.3%]. Since Phillip’s house in Caesarea seems to have been something of a way-station for traveling Christians, he probably repeated the story hundreds of times; the information given in verse 37 is likely historically correct, but the Holy Spirit didn’t have Luke include it in the inspired account.”

The Baptism “So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him” (8:38). Alexander argues that the expression “went down into the water” does not necessarily imply immersion because if it did, the baptized and the baptizer were both immersed. On the contrary, just because both went down into the water does not mean that both were immersed. Both going down into the water does, however, fit perfectly with immersion.

The Result

Joy “Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing” (8:39). At the beginning of the passage, an angel of the Lord directed Philip (8:26). Now the Spirit of the Lord catches Philip away. There is probably no distinction between the two (Bruce). The catching away was a “miraculous removal” (Alexander), “an extraordinary separation” (Rackham).

The Ethiopian did not see Philip anymore, but as he continued his journey to Ethiopia, his heart was filled with rejoicing (8:8). According to Irenaeus (130-202 AD), the Ethiopian became a missionary to his people (Bruce; see also Barclay), but other than that, nothing is known of Christianity in Ethiopia until the fourth century (Rackham). The Greeks considered Ethiopia the edge of the world (Bruce). So the Gospel has reached the ends of the earth (1:8).

More Ministry “But Philip was found at Azotus. And passing through, he preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea” (8:40). Phillip’s next stop was Azotus, that is, Ashdod, one of the five cities of the Philistines, which was 20 miles north of Gaza (Rackham). From there he preached in all of the cities on the Mediterranean coast until he came to Caesarea by the sea, the Roman capital of the province of Judea. Apparently, Caesarea became his prominent place of

residence (Rackham) or at least his center of operation because it is the only other place where he is mentioned (21:8-9). He is still at Caesarea twenty years later (Bruce), surrounded by a family of adult children. Rackham thinks that Philip became the head of the local church in Caesarea.

Summary: When a non-Christian asks you a question, tell them that Jesus died for their sins and that salvation is by faith.

Philip was not a “professional;” he was one of the seven chosen to distribute money.

The two stories in this chapter provide a picture of two types of people who will respond favorably to the gospel. Simon is steeped in sorcery; the eunuch is steeped in the Scriptures. Simon is lost in his sin of magic; the eunuch is lost in his religion, coming from the worship of the Temple. Both need to hear and believe the life-giving message, and they both do. The power of the gospel can reach both the “good” and the bad.

We can learn a lot about proclaiming the gospel from Philip. 1) Open with a question. 2) Use Scripture to present Christ crucified. 3) Close with the issue of faith.

For over a dozen years, I was an itinerate evangelist, traveling about the country and conducting evangelistic church meetings. Some were large; some were small. Some were ready for outreach and some were not. When I found myself in a church that was not bringing people to the meetings, I said to myself, “Obviously, God did not bring me here to see a great harvest. He must have brought me here for at least one or two individuals.” So, I began looking for my Ethiopian.

AN UNLIKELY CONVERSION

Regarding witnessing, some are likely candidates for conversion, and others are difficult, if not impossible. The extremely difficult ones include a relative we have witnessed to for years, a member of a cult, or someone who is vocally opposed to Christianity. These are unlikely conversions. Acts 9 contains the story of the most famous, unlikely conversion in church history. If you had met him before his conversion, you would have said, “There is no hope for that individual.” We need to review the story of the conversion of a man named Saul to remind us of several important spiritual truths. The story of his conversion appeared three times in the book of Acts, in 9:3-7, 20:5-16, and 26:12-18.

Before His Conversion

His Pursuit “Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord (9:1a). At this point, Luke picks up the narrative in Acts 8:3 (see “still”), which says Saul was making “havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing *them* to prison.” Rackham estimates that Saul was about 35 years of age. This story is another result of Stephen’s death, a direct answer to Stephen’s prayer, and the first fruits of Stephen’s blood.

His Plan Luke continues by saying Paul “went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem” (9:1b-2). In the book of Acts, Luke uses the expression “the Way” (19:9, 19:23; 22:4; 24:14, 24:22; see 18:25; Mt. 7:14; Mk. 12:14) and such expressions as a way of God (18:25), the way of the Lord (18:26), and the way of salvation (16:17). The Way is another name for the Christian religion (Alexander on 19:9; Marshall on 22:4; Hodges). It is “the new way of life” (Alexander; Bruce on 9:2). Christianity is not just a system of beliefs; it is a way of life (Barclay on 18:26). It is the way of salvation, thinking, and living (Alexander on 19:23). It “seems to have been a common Jewish name for doctrinal and practical diversities among themselves” (Alexander on 24:14). Perhaps, it includes their observance of the love feast and practice of baptism.

Saul was breathing threats and murders. His “passionate excitement” (Alexander) was exhibited in word and deed. He obtained permission from the high priest to arrest people of the Way in the synagogues (plural) of Damascus, both men and women and bring them to Jerusalem for trial. These were residents of Jerusalem who had fled to Damascus (Bruce; Marshall). Damascus is about 150 miles from Jerusalem (Marshall; Barclay says about 140; Hughes says it was a week’s travel). Before his conversion, Paul was a self-righteous (Phil. 3:9), bigoted, callous murderer (26:10). He was a member of another religion who is vocally opposed to Christianity. Think of the most unlikely candidate for conversion, you know. That is what Saul was like.

His Conversion

The Question “As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven” (9:3). About noon (22:6; 26:13), just outside Damascus, a light from heaven, like a great spotlight, shone around him. “From heaven” implies that it was supernatural (Alexander).

“Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’” (9:4). Saul fell to the ground as if the beam of light had knocked him down. Although it is not stated here, Saul saw the risen Christ (9:17, 27; 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8; Gal. 1:16). He heard a voice asking why he was persecuting Me. The repetition of the name “Saul” “adds solemnity and earnestness” (Alexander).

The Revelation “And he said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ Then the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads’” (9:5). Blinded by the light, Saul could not see (9:9, 12). So he asked who was speaking. Some say the word “Lord” indicates that Saul suspected that the speaker was Jesus (Alexander), but Paul did not recognize Jesus. That is why he asked who was speaking! The word “Lord” here is simply a term of polite respect.

Jesus identifies Himself as the One Saul is persecuting. Jesus identifies Himself with His people (Alexander). When Jesus identified himself, Saul realized the resurrected Christ was confronting him. The statement, “It is hard for you to kick against the goads,” is not in the MT or the CT. It was first introduced by Erasmus (Alexander), but it appears in Acts 26:14. It was a common proverb in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin literature (Rackham). The point is that it is painful, not difficult, to kick against a sharp point. Saul had been resisting evidence and authority. When Saul saw the light, he learned two things. First, he learned who Jesus is. He is the Son of God (9:20), the Messiah (9:22). Second, he learned who he is, a sinner who needed to recognize who Jesus is. Someone has said, “The light that temporarily blinded Saul permanently enlightened him.”

The Response “So he, trembling and astonished, said, ‘Lord, what do You want me to do?’ Then the Lord said to him, ‘Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do’” (9:6). “So he trembling and astonished” are not in the MT or the CT. Alexander says, “Their genuineness is also favored by their appropriateness or congruity, and the absence of anything to cause suspicion of a later forgery.”

“And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one” (9:7). Saul’s fellow travelers, probably officers of justice who traveled with him in the execution of his commission (Alexander) stood speechless because they heard a voice, but they did not see anyone speaking. In one of his accounts of his conversion, Paul says, “They did *not* hear the voice of Him who spoke to me” (22:9). They heard a voice, but not articulate speech (Bruce, who cites Jn. 12:29).

The conversion of Saul illustrates that God is seeking to save sinners (Lk. 19:10). There is a famous poem by Francis Thomson entitled “The Hound of Heaven.” In it, Thomas says, “I fled, I fled, I hid from Him and spoke of “those strong Feet that followed after.”

After His Conversion

Saul’s Sight “Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus” (9:8). Saul got up from being knocked down, but he could not see; he was blind (9:9, 12). Others led him by the hand into

Damascus. The proud Pharisee and persistent persecutor had to be led by the hand (Rackham). The angry bull (9:1) had become a docile lamb (Wiersbe). He approached Damascus like an avenging fury but was led into the city blind and as a helpless child (Barclay). The self-righteous, callous murderer was now a blind, impotent man (Hughes).

“And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank” (9:9). For three days after meeting the Lord, Saul could not see, nor did he eat or drink. By Jewish reckoning, the three days could have been one whole day and portions to two other days (Alexander). His spiritual eyes had been opened, but his physical eyes had been closed (Wiersbe).

“Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, ‘Ananias’ And he said, ‘Here I am, Lord’” (9:10). Ananias was a disciple of Christ residing at Damascus. When the expression “Here I am, Lord” is addressed to a superior, it suggests readiness for service or promptness to obey (Alexander).

“So the Lord *said* to him, ‘Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for *one* called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying and in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting *his* hand on him, so that he might receive his sight’” (9:11-12). The Lord told Ananias to go to the street Straight, the only street named in the New Testament (Alexander). He was to locate the house of Judas, where he would find Saul of Tarsus. Tarsus was the capital of the Roman province of Cecilia (in modern Turkey). One ancient author said it was equal or superior to Alexandria and Athens as a seat of science (Alexander). Rackham says it was the seat of a university and school of philosophy, which came behind Athens and Alexandria alone. Ananias was to put his hand on Saul, who had been prepared by means of a vision so that he would receive his sight. The Lord did not use the apostles for this assignment; He apparently used an obscure disciple, who, as the record indicates, was not a leader or evangelist like Philip.

“Then Ananias answered, ‘Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name’” (9:13-14). Like Moses (Ex. 3:11-13; 4:1, 10, 13) and Jeremiah (Jer. 1:6), Ananias objected. His concern was not a personal injury; Saul was blind and praying. He thought, “Can it be that this arch-bigot and fanatic is approachable by me on such an errand?” (Alexander). Ananias reminded the Lord how much damage Saul had done to His children in Jerusalem and how much authority he had from the chief priests to do more damage to His children in Damascus. Ananias calls God’s children saints, used for the first time to describe believers (Alexander). He also designates them as those who call on God’s name, not those called by God’s name. They call on the Lord for help, protection, and worship (Alexander). Someone has suggested that every Christian goes through three stages: “This is easy.” “This is difficult.” “This is impossible!” Ananias was in stage three.

“But the Lord said to him, ‘Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake’” (9:15-16). The Lord informed Ananias that He had chosen Saul to proclaim His name and suffer for His name. In the Greek text, the “I” is emphatic.

“And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit’” (9:17). True to his word (9:10), Ananias did as he was instructed. He found the house (9:11) and Saul. He laid hands on him to receive his sight and to be filled with the Spirit.

“Immediately there fell from his eyes *something* like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized” (9:18). Saul not only received his sight, but he was also baptized. A Christian businessman experienced one catastrophe after another but remained cheerful. First, his son was in a serious auto accident. Then, his daughter married a man of questionable character. Finally, the lease on his building was not renewed. When asked about his positive attitude, he said the sergeant always chose him for dangerous missions when he was in the army. At first, he complained, but a buddy said to him, “He picks you because he trusts you. He wouldn’t stake the lives of the whole outfit on a coward!” The businessman said, “From that moment on, I have viewed my hardships as a sort of pat on the back from the Lord.”

Saul’s Sermons at Damascus “So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus. Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God” (9:19-20). Saul also broke his fast. After spending several days with the disciples, Saul preached that Jesus was Christ, the Son of God, in the synagogues (plural). This is the first time Jesus is proclaimed the Son of God (Rackham). It is the only time Jesus is called the Son of God in Acts (Bruce).

“Then all who heard were amazed, and said, ‘Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?’” (9:21). Those who heard the former persecutor were amazed at his transformation. He destroyed believers in Jerusalem (Gal. 1:13, 23) and came to Damascus to arrest believers and take them to Jerusalem, and now he is preaching the very thing he was persecuting.

“But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this *Jesus* is the Christ” (9:22). In the meantime, Saul was growing in strength. He increased in the strength of his conviction and his persuasion power (Alexander). From the Scripture, He proved that Jesus is the Messiah. The Greek word translated “proving” means “to join or knit together, unite, to prove, demonstrate.” It was used for putting together arguments (Rackham). It is used here of placing the Old Testament prophecies alongside their fulfillment (Bruce). His demonstration that Jesus is the Messiah confounded the Jews. The Greek word translated “confounded” means “to throw into confusion, to stir up, to trouble.” It describes the mingling and mixing of thoughts that produce bewilderment and prevent clear perception and conclusive reasoning (Alexander).

“Now, after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him” (9:23). Before going to Jerusalem, Paul spent three years in Arabia (Gal. 1:17-18; Marshall places the trip to Arabia here. Wiersbe puts it between verses 21 and 22; Alexander puts it before verse 26, but in Galatians 1:17, Paul says that after he went to Arabia, he returned to Damascus). Arabia refers to the Nabataen kingdom, which lay on the eastern frontier of Syria and stretched south to the Red Sea (Bruce). Since Paul says, “In Damascus, the governor, under Aretas, the king, was guarding the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desiring to arrest me” (2 Cor. 11:32), Marshall says it is likely that Paul was preaching in Arabia and his preaching stirred up trouble among the Jewish community there. He also says that it is equally likely that the Jews in Damascus enlisted the support of the governor. The Jewish leaders in Damascus concluded that Saul had to be killed. He was about to become the victim of the kind of persecution that he once practiced (Marshall).

“But their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates day and night, to kill him” (9:24). Saul learned of the sinister plot of the Jewish leaders. They guarded the gates of the city day and night so that they might apprehend and eliminate Saul. He came to Damascus seeking to eliminate others and now others are seeking to eliminate him.

“Then the disciples took him by night and let *him* down through the wall in a large basket” (9:25). Since the gates were being watched, Paul was let down the wall in a large basket during the night. It has been suggested that some of them were Saul’s own converts (Alexander). It has also been suggested that this was done from a house built on the city wall. The window of the house was cut in the wall (Bruce).

Saul’s Service at Jerusalem “And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple” (9:26). Saul traveled back to Jerusalem, but when he tried to join the disciples, they would not accept him because they were afraid he was not a disciple. Could this be a scheme to gain their confidence (Bruce)?

“But Barnabas took him and brought *him* to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus” (9:27). Barnabas went to the apostles, not the disciples (9:26), telling them about Saul’s experience, his preaching in the name of Jesus, as well as his conversations with him.

“So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out” (9:28). As a result of Barnabas’ intervention, Saul was recognized by the apostles as a genuine convert and minister of the gospel. According to Paul’s account in the book of Galatians, the only apostles at Jerusalem at this time were Peter and James (Gal. 1:18-20).

“And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists, but they attempted to kill him” (9:29). With his new-found freedom, Saul spoke openly about Jesus being the Christ and he entered into disputes with those Hellenists, that is, the Greek-speaking Jews. This time, they decided to kill him (22:17-21). Saul preached to the Hellenists in Jerusalem but not outside Jerusalem (Gal. 1:22).

Saul’s Stay at Caesarea and Tarsus “When the brethren found out, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus” (9:30). When the plot to kill Saul was discovered, believers accompanied Paul to Caesarea and from there sent him to his hometown of Tarsus. At the time, Philip was a resident of Caesarea (8:40).

The Spread of the Churches “Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied” (9:31). The churches in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria grew and prospered (Alexander). This is the only time the churches of Galilee are mentioned. The Greek word translated “comfort” means to call to one’s aid, exhortation, encouragement, consolation, and comfort. Rackham says the fear of the Lord drives believers to keep the commandments and the Holy Spirit enables them to do so.

Even though the Lord Himself appeared to Paul, he still needed sponsors, Ananias in Damascus and Barnabas in Jerusalem. A pastor friend says Saul had an example in Steven, an equipper in Ananias, and an encourager in Barnabas.

Summary: By the Grace of God, the most unlikely man was converted and nurtured in the faith with the help of others. Saul, the persecutor, became Paul, the preacher.

The 18th-century statesman George Lyttelton was skeptical about Christianity. He was convinced that Saul had “acted out” his conversion to gain attention for himself. He believed that if the resurrection of Christ and the conversion of Saul could be discredited, the rest of the New Testament would be worthless. After an exhaustive study of Saul’s life, he wrote *The Observations on the Conversion and the Apostleship of St. Paul*. He concluded, “The conversion

and the apostleship of Paul alone, duly considered, is in itself a demonstration sufficient to prove Christianity to be a divine revelation.” Lyttleton became a Christian.

Unlikely conversions still take place. John Newton, the author of the hymn “Amazing Grace,” pastored a church in London. In that church, there is an epitaph he wrote for himself. It reads, “Sacred to the memory of John Newton, once a libertine and blasphemer and trader of slaves in Africa, renewed, purified, pardoned and appointed to preach that Gospel which he had labored to destroy.”

Roger Oakland, author of *Faith Undone*, writes, “I became a Christian in the late 1970s. For me, it was like a light coming on in a dark room. I could see reality for the first time. As an unbeliever, I had been locked into a world of materialism, evolutionism, and secularism. When the grace of God drew me to the Word of God, I experienced an awakening. From the moment I was converted, I was able to see God’s plan to save mankind in contrast to Satan’s plan to deceive the world” (Oakland, p. 92).

Hughes says, “The story of Saul’s spiritual transformation ought to remind us never to write off as being beyond the love of Christ. We may do so with relatives whom we know have heard the word for years without a response, sinners who have gone to a crass level of depravity, or someone who has gone into a cult or is propagating false doctrine. The Scripture is clear—God can reach anyone!”

THE GREATEST MIRACLE

What would you say is the greatest miracle? Healing a lame man? Healing a blind lady? Casting out a demon? Raising the dead? None of the above? The answer may surprise you. A passage in Acts records several miracles, including the greatest.

The Healing of Aeneas

The Traveling “Now it came to pass, as Peter went through all *parts of the country*, that he also came down to the saints who dwelt in Lydda” (9:32). Peter traveled through all of the country, that is, he passed through all its cities or all the places where churches were established (Alexander). He landed at Lydda, a large village between Jerusalem and Joppa (Rackham), about 25 miles from Jerusalem (Marshall). The nucleus of believers at Lydda was formed by the converts at Pentecost (Wiersbe), or by the fugitives from the persecution in Jerusalem, or possibly from Philip’s preaching on his way from Azotus to Caesarea (Bruce; Marshall, who cites 8:40).

“There he found a certain man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden eight years and was paralyzed” (9:33). At Lydda, Peter met a paralytic, who, no doubt, was a burden to himself as well as others. There was no prospect that he would ever get well (Wiersbe).

The Healing “And Peter said to him, ‘Aeneas, Jesus the Christ heals you. Arise and make your bed.’ Then he arose immediately” (9:34). Peter healed the paralytic in the name of Jesus the Christ. Peter was not a source of power; he was the channel of power (Barclay). Peter told Aeneas to make his bed, roll it up, and put it away (Bruce), which is proof of his entire restoration (Alexander). Jesus is still healing (Rackham). Chuck Swindoll says this was truly a miracle. Many have said to teenagers, “Get up and make up your bed,” without ever witnessing that event actually take place!

The Result “So all who dwelt at Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord” (9:35). As a result of the raising of Aeneas, those at Lydda and Sharon, turned to the Lord, that is, they were converted (Alexander). The phrase “all who dwelt” indicates a large number (Marshall). Peter did more in Lydda than this isolated incident of healing, including evangelizing, teaching, and encouraging believers (Wiersbe, who cites Jn. 21:15-17). Marshall says, “Luke would have disagreed with the common modern suggestion that a faith-based on miracles is not a true faith; where the healing (and judging) power of God is displayed in act as well as in word, there is a right for people to make the response to it, and the mighty word can act as a persuasive alongside of the word.”

People were saved when they saw the transformation in Aeneas. When people see supernatural things happening in our lives, such as responding to trial with joy, some get it. We are the salt that creates thirst.

Barclay says, “It is doubtful if anyone has ever been argued into Christianity by verbal proofs and logical demonstrations. The proof of Christianity is that it works, that it does change men, that it does make bad men good, that it does bring to men the Spirit of God. It is when a man’s deeds give the lie to his words that the gravest discredit is brought on Christianity; it is when a

man's words are guaranteed by his deeds that the world is presented with an argument for Christianity that will brook no denial" (Barclay, *Acts*, p. 92).

The Raising of Tabitha

The Death of Tabitha "At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did" (9:36). Luke abruptly focuses on a lady named Tabitha, who resided at Joppa. Tabitha, an Aramaic word, is translated by the Greek name Dorcas. Tabitha was a disciple who was full of good works in general and charitable deeds in particular. She trusted Christ for eternal life, became a disciple (a learner), and did good works.

Fred Craddock, who taught at Candler School of Theology, Emory University, once said: "We think giving our all to the Lord is like taking a \$1,000 bill and laying it on the table—'Here's my life, Lord. I'm giving it all.' But the reality for most of us is that he sends us to the bank and has us cash in the \$1,000 for quarters. We go through life putting out 25 cents here and 50 cents there. Listen to the neighbor kid's troubles instead of saying, 'Get lost.' Go to a committee meeting. Give a cup of water to a shaky old man in a nursing home. Usually, giving our life to Christ isn't glorious. It's done in all those little acts of love, 25 cents at a time. It would be easy to go out in a flash of glory; it's harder to live the Christian life little by little over the long haul."

"But it happened in those days that she became sick and died. When they had washed her, they laid *her* in an upper room" (9:37). In "those days" that Peter resided in Lydda (Alexander), Tabitha got sick and died. Her family washed the body per Jewish custom (Bruce) and placed it in an upper room.

The Arrival of Peter "And since Lydda was near Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent two men to him, imploring *him* not to delay in coming to them" (9:38). Lydda was about eleven miles from Joppa (Bruce says ten or eleven; Alexander says ten or twelve; Rackham and Marshall say twelve.). Having heard of the healing of Aeneas, the disciples sent two men to Lydda to get Peter.

"Then Peter arose and went with them. When he had come, they brought *him* to the upper room. And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them" (9:39). When Peter arrived, he found weeping widows, who showed Peter things Tabitha made while she was alive. The expression "all the widows" may refer to all the widows Tabitha helped (Alexander; Bruce). Marshall says the Greek text indicates these were the clothes they were wearing. These were part of her good works.

The Raising of Tabitha "But Peter put them all out, and knelt down and prayed. And turning to the body he said, 'Tabitha, arise' and she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up" (9:40). Like Jesus did at the house of Jairus (Mt. 9:25; Lk. 8:51), Peter ushered everyone out of the room. Then he knelt, prayed, and commanded Tabitha to arise (Mk. 5:41). Tabitha opened her eyes, saw Peter, and sat up.

"Then he gave her *his* hand and lifted her up; and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive" (9:41). Peter lifted her off the bed by his hand and presented her alive to the saints and widows.

The Results of the Raising "And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord" (9:42). The raising of Tabitha from the dead resulted in many in Joppa being

converted. They believed on the Lord. Alexander says that the preposition (*επι*) suggests reliance or dependence, as in Acts 1:17, 15:31, and 22:19.

“So it was that he stayed many days in Joppa with Simon, a tanner” (9:43). Peter ended up staying in Joppa for some time. He stayed with Simon, who was a tanner, an unclean occupation according to the Jews (Alexander), because it involved continual contact with unclean animals (Rackham; Bruce says dead animals). Marshall points out that people with Pharisaic scruples would avoid contact with such a man.

Summary: God’s supernatural work in people’s lives resulted in people believing in the Lord.

In the context of Acts, this incident illustrates that Jesus is still working. Peter said, “Jesus the Christ heals you” (9:34). Peter prayed (9:40).

In the context of this section, these incidents introduce Peter’s ministry to the Gentiles. Acts 9:32-43 introduces what happens in Acts 10:1-11:18 (Alexander). Hughes says a tanner’s place of business was anathema to a fastidious Jew, that a tanner was ostracized, had to live 50 cubits outside of town, and that if a woman discovered that her fiancé was involved in tanning, she could break the engagement. Hughes adds God was at work in Peter’s heart, softening his prejudices. This is significant because of what happens in the next chapter. A Pastor said, “I believe that the miracle done in Peter was greater than either of the miracles done through him.”

The point of the passage is that God’s work in people’s lives resulted in people believing in the Lord. Peter performs three miracles in this passage: healing, raising Tabitha from the dead, and bringing the message of salvation. Salvation is the greatest miracle of all. As Wiersbe points out, “Because salvation costs the greatest price, it produces the greatest results, and it brings the greatest glory to God.”

Hodges says that as in Acts 4:12, these miracles are symbols of spiritual salvation. He points out the similarities between the healing of the paralyzed man by Jesus and the healing of the paralyzed man by Peter (see the precise Greek phrase used by Luke to describe the healing of the man in Luke 5, namely “who was paralyzed” in Lk. 5:18 and Acts 9:33, and both were told to do something with their bed after they were healed; see Lk. 5:24 and Acts 9:34). The healing by Jesus is connected to the forgiveness of sins (10:43). He goes on to say that paralysis pictures the spiritual helplessness and immobility of unforgiven sin. Although Cornelius prayed, fasted, and gave alms, he was helpless in overcoming his problem. He needed an answer to prayer (10:31). Cornelius had spiritual paralysis and needed others to help him, such as the angel, the messengers and Peter. Hodges also suggests that Aeneas illustrates forgiveness and Tabitha illustrates the giving of life. She was full of good works, but she needed life.

On a cold winter day, Thomas Carlyle was sitting near his fireplace when the door opened and the new pastor of a nearby church came into his house. After they had exchanged a few words, the young preacher asked the philosopher, “What do you think our community needs more than anything else?” Without hesitation, Carlyle answered, “What our community needs more than anything else is a man who knows God experientially, not simply from what he has learned from others.” What the world needs today is Christians who personally know God’s power in their life!

WHO LET THEM IN HERE?

There are cases of members of an exclusive club objecting to allowing certain types of people into their group. For example, I remember a time when men's clubs would not allow women to join. Can you imagine that happening in a church? It not only happened, but it was also a major problem in the first century. When the church began, it was made up exclusively of Jews. Jesus was a Jew. So were the apostles, Paul, and all of the first Christians. To many, it would have been unthinkable to allow Gentiles to join. How did Christianity get to be a non-Jewish movement? Who first let the Gentiles into the fold? The story of what happened unfolds like a three-act play, with the third act being exceptionally long.

Act One: The Man

His Observances “There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, a devout *man* and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always” (10:1-2). Luke introduces Cornelius, a centurion living in Caesarea. He is the main character in this drama. Caesarea was the capital of the Roman province of Judea and the residence of the Roman governor (Rackham). It was largely a Gentile city (Bruce).

Cornelius was a centurion of an Italian regiment, that is, a regiment composed of Roman (Alexander) volunteers (Rackham). The Roman army was divided into legions, normally consisting of 6,000 men. Each legion contained ten cohorts (600 men) and each cohort had six centuries (100 men). A centurion was over a century (Rackham). The duties of a centurion were similar to a modern army captain (Bruce). Barclay cites an ancient historian who describes the qualifications of a centurion like this: “Centurions are desired not to be overbold and reckless so much as good leaders, of steady and prudent mind, not prone to take the offensive to start fighting wantonly, but able when over-whelmed and hard-pressed to stand fast and die at their posts.”

Cornelius was a pious, reverent man of prayer who feared the true God and generously gave alms to people, probably a reference to chosen people, the children of Israel (Alexander). He was not a proselyte to Judaism (Alexander). He had not been circumcised (11:3). He was a God-fearer (Rackham; Bruce; Marshall). Proselytes were circumcised and were bound to keep the whole law. God-fearers accepted the creed of one true God, observed various Jewish customs, and were admitted to a place in the synagogue (Rackham). Cornelius was a devotedly religious person who was genuinely seeking God. He was a seeker, groping after God to find Him (17:27; Rackham). The first Gentile with whom Jesus had any dealings was a centurion stationed in Capernaum (Bruce).

His Orders “About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, ‘Cornelius!’” (10:3). About three o'clock in the afternoon (Marshall), Cornelius had a vision, in which he saw an angel, no doubt clothed in human form (Alexander), who called him by name.

“And when he observed him, he was afraid, and said, ‘What is it, lord?’ So he said to him, ‘Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God’” (10:4). Cornelius was

afraid, in the sense of being awe-struck, at the presence of the supernatural being (Alexander). When Cornelius asked about the occasion of the visitation, he was told that God had noticed his prayers and alms. His charity had ascended into the divine presence like incense or the smoke of a sacrifice (Bruce). When some high school students in Pomona, California, posted a video on YouTube entitled “Is Anybody Listening?” The next thing they knew, they received a visit from the President of the United States. Can you imagine their shock? That is the way Cornelius felt.

“Now send men to Joppa, and send for Simon whose surname is Peter. He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea. He will tell you what you must do” (10:5-6).

Cornelius was told to send men to Joppa. Joppa was 30 miles away (Rackham). When Jonah was told to take God’s message to the Gentiles, he flew to Joppa. At Joppa, the messenger would find Simon Peter, who was staying at Simon, the Tanner’s home. Simon Peter would tell him what he had to do. Rackham remarks that even though God remembered Cornelius, the revelation Cornelius sought was not given directly. Like Saul, he must be told by the church. Notice that the angels did not give the message to Cornelius. They told him to summon a *human* messenger. God’s method of evangelism is people, not angels.

His Obedience “And when the angel who spoke to him had departed, Cornelius called two of his household servants and a devout soldier from among those who waited on him continually. So when he had explained all *these* things to them, he sent them to Joppa” (10:7-8). After the angel departed, Cornelius chose two of his domestic servants, a devout soldier and a God-fearer, like himself (Bruce). He explained what they were to do and sent them to Joppa. It has been suggested that since it was 30 miles away, they rode and they may have taken an animal for Peter (see Marshall).

God sends the message to those want to know (Jn. 7:17).

Act Two: The Messenger

The Occasion “The next day, as they went on their journey and drew near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour” (10:9). Peter is the second character in this drama. The day after the angel appeared to Cornelius, as the messengers from Cornelius approached Joppa, Peter retired to the rooftop to pray. The flat housetops were used for prayer, meditation, sleeping, and recreation (Rackham). It was the sixth hour after sunrise, one of the three appointed times of prayer during the day (Alexander; Bruce says it was *not* one of the appointed times of prayer).

“Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance” (10:10). Since mealtime was approaching, Peter was hungry. Peter fell into a trance while the people in the house were preparing food.

The Orders “And saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth. In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air” (10:11-12). Peter saw an object like a great sheet bounded on all four corners, descending from heaven, filled with beasts, birds, and creeping creatures. According to the Mosaic Law, the sheet’s creatures were clean and unclean (10:14; Lev. 11; Deut. 14).

“And a voice came to him, ‘Rise, Peter; kill and eat.’ But Peter said, ‘Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean’” (10:13-14). God gave a hungry man (10:10) a vision of food! When a voice commanded Peter to kill and eat the creatures he saw in the sheet, he objected that he had never eaten anything classified as unclean, such as pork, with the

implication that he would not start now (Bruce). “Generally speaking, the Jew might eat only animals which chewed the cud and whose hoofs were cloven. All others were *unclean* and forbidden. Peter was shocked and protested that he had never eaten anything that was unclean” (Barclay).

This was not a personal preference. It constituted one of the most striking differences between the Jews in the Gentiles. Peter insists that he always lived as a strict Jew and, therefore, separated himself from other people (Alexander). Barclay points out, “Strict Jews believed that God had no use for the Gentiles. Sometimes, they even went the length of saying that help must not be given to a Gentile woman in childbirth because that would only be to bring another Gentile into the world.”

Peter is staying with Simon, the tanner (10:6). Barclay makes an interesting observation. “A tanner worked with the dead bodies of animals and, therefore, he was permanently unclean (Numbers 19:11–13). No rigid Jew would have dreamed of accepting hospitality from a tanner. It was his uncleanness that made it necessary for Simon to dwell on the sea-shore outside the city. No doubt this tanner was a Christian and Peter had begun to see that Christianity abolished these petty laws and taboos.” It should be pointed out that Simon was a Jew, whereas the issues before Peter concerned Gentiles.

“And a voice *spoke* to him again the second time, ‘What God has cleansed you must not call common.’ This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again” (10:15-16). The voice from heaven told Peter that he must not call unclean what God had cleansed. Bruce suggested that Peter was present when the Lord told the Pharisees and scribes that it was not what went into a man that defiled him but what comes out, thus declaring all foods clean (Mk. 7:14-19). The point of the vision was not about food. It was about the divine cleansing of people (Bruce. 10:30; 15:9).

Evidently, Peter did not get it when the Lord taught it, not then nor until now. So, after repeating the message again, the object was taken up into heaven. The message was repeated three times to make it emphatic (Rackham).

Act Three: The Meeting

The Messengers “Now while Peter wondered within himself what this vision which he had seen meant, behold, the men who had been sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon’s house, and stood before the gate” (10:17). The plot thickens. The Greek word translated “wondered” means “to be quite at a loss, be in great perplexity.” Peter was utterly at a loss to explain the message he had just received (10:17). As he pondered the vision’s possible message, the messengers from Cornelius were at the gate.

“And they called and asked whether Simon, whose surname was Peter, was lodging there” (10:18). The visitors called from the gate to see if they had the right residence to find Simon Peter.

“While Peter thought about the vision, the Spirit said to him, ‘Behold, three men are seeking you. Arise, therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them’” (10:19-20). Meanwhile, as Peter was pondering the point of the vision, the Holy Spirit interrupted his thoughts to tell him that the men at the gate were seeking him and that he should greet them because He, the Spirit, had sent them. This statement demonstrates the personality of the Holy Spirit (Rackham) and that the risen Christ manifests His presence and power through the Holy Spirit (Bruce).

Peter was told not to doubt. The Greek word translated “doubt” means “to separate,” hence, “to distinguish, discriminate, decide, dispute, to be divided in one’s mind, to hesitate, doubt.” Alexander suggests that the meaning here is that Peter was not to make any gratuitous distinctions between Jew and Gentile, which is the way it is used in Acts 11:12 (Rackham; Wiersbe). Peter understood he was not to call people common or unclean (10:28).

“Then Peter went down to the men who had been sent to him from Cornelius, and said, ‘Yes, I am he whom you seek. For what reason have you come?’” (10:21). Peter came down from the top of the house (10:9) to greet the messengers from Cornelius. After telling them he was the one they were seeking, He asked why they had come.

“And they said, ‘Cornelius *the* centurion, a just man, one who fears God and has a good reputation among all the nation of the Jews, was divinely instructed by a holy angel to summon you to his house, and to hear words from you” (10:22). The messengers explained that an angel had told Cornelius to have Peter come and speak to him. They described Cornelius as a centurion, a righteous man who feared the God of Israel (Alexander) and had a good reputation among the Jewish people. From this description, it was obvious that Cornelius was a Gentile.

“Then he invited them in and lodged *them*. On the next day, Peter went away with them, and some brethren from Joppa accompanied him” (10:23). Peter invited the messengers from Cornelius to spend the night. Peter entertaining Gentiles was a step in the right direction, although it did not expose him to the risk of defilement as accepting Gentile hospitality (Bruce). The next day, the messengers and some Jewish believers from Joppa (11:12 says there were six) accompanied Peter to Caesarea.

The Meeting “And the following day they entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them, and had called together his relatives and close friends” (10:24). The day after they left, they entered Caesarea, which was 30 miles from Joppa. In the meantime, Cornelius was not only waiting for them, he assembled his relatives and close friends to hear what Peter had to say. The house was undoubtedly packed with his wife, children, perhaps, his parents and in-laws, servants, and his military associates.

“As Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped *him*” (10:25). As Peter was entering Cornelius’s house, Cornelius fell at his feet and worshiped him. After all, the angel had promised divine communication. It is not surprising that Cornelius would have assumed that the messenger was more than a mere man (Alexander).

“But Peter lifted him up, saying, ‘Stand up; I myself am also a man’” (10:26). Lifting Cornelius up from his prostrated position, Peter informed him that he was a mere mortal.

“And as he talked with him, he went in and found many who had come together” (10:27). As Peter and Cornelius talked together, they walked further into the house. For Peter to enter the house of a Gentile was a distinct breach of Jewish custom, which Peter acknowledges (10:28; Rackham). Peter discovered that many had come to hear him.

The Greeting “Then he said to them, ‘You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean. Therefore, I came without objection as soon as I was sent for. I ask, then, for what reason have you sent for me?’” (10:28-29). Peter greets those assembled by telling them that, as they know, as Jews, it was contrary to his custom (Alexander) to keep company with Gentiles, but God has shown him that no one should be considered unclean. The vision Peter received taught him that no food was unclean, but he was quick to grasp the analogy between the food laws and the conventions concerning intercourse with people (Bruce;

Marshall). It was largely because of the food laws that Jews did not eat with Gentiles. Peter asks them why they sent for him. He knew, but he asked.

“So Cornelius said, ‘Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing and said, ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard, and your alms are remembered in the sight of God. Send therefore to Joppa and call Simon here, whose surname is Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea. When he comes, he will speak to you.’ So I sent to you immediately, and you have done well to come. Now, therefore, we are all present before God, to hear all the things commanded you by God” (10:30-33). Cornelius explains that four days before, as he was praying, a man dressed in bright clothing appeared and told him that his prayers had been heard and that he should send for Peter. He invites Peter to tell him all the things that God had commanded him. What Luke said was an angel (10:3), Cornelius says was a man because the angel appeared in human form (Alexander).

Act Four: The Message

God is not Partial “Then Peter opened *his* mouth and said: ‘In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him” (10:34-35). The expression “opened his mouth” introduced a weighty utterance (Bruce). C. H. Dodd argues that the outline of the Gospel of Mark is comparable to Peter’s speech here (Dodd, cited by Bruce).

Peter began with the last lesson God had taught him, namely, that God is not partial. It should be pointed out that the Old Testament teaches that God does not practice partiality (Deut. 10:17), but it had been limited in scope and application (Rackham). Alexander says that partiality is the preference of one person over another on grounds other than what is right and just. In fact, in every nation, meaning not just among the Jews (Alexander), there are people God accepts.

God accepts those who fear Him, that is, trust Him and live righteous lives. Rackham makes several insightful comments. The righteousness of Cornelius was “acceptable to God in this sense that it predisposed him to justification,” not that it had any merit. “His natural goodness had fitted him to receive the Word.” These “God-fearing Gentiles had been longing for a revelation of God.” Marshall said Peter expressed the thought that God would accept anyone in any race who reverences Him and lives righteously. He goes on to say that if Cornelius had said, “My good deeds are sufficient to win favor with God and I have no need of the gospel, he would not have been accepted by God. The good life is only acceptable in God’s sight when it leads to the realization that is inadequate. Cornelius wanted to hear the gospel. Wiersbe points out that this statement does not teach salvation by works; otherwise, Peter would contradict himself (10:43). He goes on to say that to fear God is to reverence and trust Him.

Jesus Preached Peace “The word which *God* sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ; He is Lord of all; that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him” (10:36-38). The word of salvation God (13:26) sent to the children of Israel is peace (reconciliation; Alexander) through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all, not just the Jews. Marshall contends that the word “peace” is a synonym for salvation (Rom. 5:1; Eph. 2:17; 6:15).

Peter goes on to say that, as they well know, Jesus began preaching in Galilee after the baptism of John and the message spread through all Judea. God anointed Jesus with the power of the Holy Spirit (Alexander) to do good, even healing those oppressed by the devil. At His baptism, Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit (Bruce). Jesus did not just do what was right; He did that which was good, doing favors and showing mercy (Alexander).

The Apostles are Witnesses “And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree. Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly, not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, even to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead” (10:39-41). The people to whom Peter was speaking only heard about these things (10:37). The apostles were witnesses of them. They witnessed His miracles, His crucifixion, and His resurrection. In fact, they were chosen by God to be witnesses, even eating with Him after the resurrection. Luke is the only one of the four Gospel writers that records Jesus eating with the disciples after the resurrection (Lk. 24:41-43).

The Apostles Preached “And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead. To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins” (10:42-43). The apostles were not only chosen to be witnesses, they were commanded to publicly proclaim and testify that God ordained Jesus to be the Judge of all humanity. Moreover, as the prophets testified, those who believe in Jesus, that is, “trusting and relying on him” (Alexander), will receive the remission of sins. Jesus is not only Judge, He is also the Savoir. The expression “all the prophets” indicates that the whole drift of the prophetic Scriptures is in this direction (Alexander). Marshall suggests that Peter may have had in mind such passages as Isaiah 33:24, 53:4-6, Jeremiah 31:34, and Daniel. 9:24.

Act Five: The Manifestation

Speaking in Tongues “While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word” (10:44). “These words” might refer to the whole discourse, but it more natural to understand them as referring to what immediately precedes (Alexander). When Peter said that those who believe would receive the remission of sins, all who were listening to his speech believed (10:43; 11:17; and 15:7-9; see Marshall; Wiersbe) and, as a result, the Holy Spirit fell on them. Unlike what happened in Samaria in Acts 8, there was no laying on of hands.

“And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God” (10:45-46a). The Jewish believers who came with Peter (10:23), were astonished. The Greek word rendered “astonished” means “to drive out of one’s senses, confound, amaze” (8:9; 11:13). They were amazed that the Holy Spirit was given to these uncircumcised, “unclean” Gentiles, that is, Gentiles who had not first become Jews. None of them, “perhaps not even Peter himself” (Bruce), was prepared to accept the Holy Spirit coming upon Gentiles.

Luke explains (“for”) that they knew that the Gentiles had received the Holy Spirit because they spoke in tongues, that is, foreign languages (Alexander). Like the Jews who spoke “the wonderful works of God” (2:11) when they received the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, these Gentiles magnified God, meaning they spoke of His greatness (Alexander). Bruce says that speaking the wonderful work of God (2:11) is synonymous with magnifying God here.

Baptism “Then Peter answered, ‘Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?’” (10:46b-47). Peter’s response is that since they had received the Holy Spirit, they should be baptized (8:36). The point is that if God is willing to accept them, why should man insist on them becoming Jews first? They were baptized, not circumcised.

“And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days” (10:48). Peter commanded the converts to be baptized in the name of the Lord, which means by his authority (Alexander). After the baptism, Peter stayed a few more days.

Summary: God worked supernaturally to get the Christian Jews to allow the Gentiles into the church.

There is more than just evangelism going on in this passage. God instructed Cornelius to send for Peter, not Philip. This was the job of an apostle. This is the beginning of Gentiles being accepted into the church. Luke, who was a Gentile, records it in detail. God used two dreams to teach that Gentiles should be acceptable. A Gentile was given a dream to send for a Jew, and a Jew was given a dream indicating that he was no longer to distinguish between ceremonially clean and unclean food; therefore, he could eat with and accept Gentiles. God confirmed this with the Holy Spirit’s baptism and speaking in tongues. The length of the story and the reference to it later in the book of Acts (15:7-9) indicates Luke’s great importance on it (Marshall). It deals with the decisive issue of allowing Gentiles into the church. The point is that salvation is available to all.

This story also illustrates that while God could bring people to Himself without human instrumentality (dreams), He chooses to use people to accomplish His work (Peter). God’s method of evangelism is not to use supernatural means such as dreams or to use supernatural agents such as angels. His method is people. M. R. DeHaan said, “If you’re a believer, it is because someone was instrumental in introducing you to the Lord Jesus. The Holy Spirit leads every individual to salvation through the testimony of another, whether by preaching, writing, or personal testimony. It is God’s way of propagating the gospel.”

God wants all to come to His Son and be in the church. Luke records, “Then He (Jesus) said to him, ‘A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, ‘Come, for all things are now ready.’ But they all, with one accord, began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.’ And another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.’ Still, another said, ‘I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.’ So that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind.’ And the servant said, ‘Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.’ Then the master said to the servant, ‘Go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper’” (Lk. 14:16-24).

EXPLAIN YOURSELF

In 1987, Ronald Reagan said in a speech in front of the Berlin Wall in West Germany, “General Secretary Gorbachev, if you seek peace and prosperity for the Soviet Union, come here to this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!” Two years later, the wall came down. People who had been separated for forty years became one nation.

In the early days of Christianity, there was a wall that divided people. It was not made of brick and mortar. It came down, but not without questioning and opposition. Peter, the man who was present when the wall came down, was challenged for his part in it. He was “called on the carpet.” Have you ever done something others questioned? If you have, you know how Peter must have felt after he preached the gospel to Gentiles, and they were saved. He was put on the “hot seat” for allowing the Gentiles to become Christians without being circumcised first. How would you defend yourself against such a charge?

The Charge

The Report “Now the apostles and brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God” (11:1). The apostles and the brethren heard that the Gentiles in Caesarea had received the Word of God, that is, the gospel (Alexander). The news of what had happened reached Jerusalem before Peter did (Bruce). Marshall points out that the reaction of the apostles and the members of the church in Judea, that is, the believers in Jerusalem and the surrounding area, to the response of the Gentiles to the gospel was all-important for the future.

The Reaction “And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him saying, ‘You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!’” (11:2-3). When Peter arrived in Jerusalem, those of the circumcision, that is, Jewish believers (Bruce), contended with Peter because he ate with Gentiles. Wiersbe calls them a “strong legalistic party” but says it is possible they were genuine believers who did not understand their freedom in Christ. Marshall accurately analyzes the problem when he says, “If Jewish Christians felt bound by the Jewish food laws, there could not be fellowship with Gentile Christians (or contact with non-Christian Gentiles) unless the Gentiles were circumcised and observed the Jewish food laws themselves.”

With a warm heart filled with praise for what God had done, Peter returned to be greeted with an “iceberg of Jewish prejudice” (Ray Stedman). The Greek word rendered “contended” means “to dispute” (this is the same word that appears in 10:20 and 11:12, where it means “to make a distinction or difference”).

The dispute with Peter over a “trivial issue” (Alexander) of the violation of a Jewish custom rather than what could have been a more serious issue of baptizing those who had never been circumcised! On the other hand, the Jews were accustomed to baptizing Gentile proselytes (Rackham). The issue is more than food laws. The issue is the gospel. Are all accepted by faith or must you be one of “us”? These Jews were practicing elitism.

Alexander Maclaren explains, “The critics did not venture to cavil at his preaching to Gentiles. Probably none of them had any objection to such being welcomed into the Church, for they can scarcely have wished to make the door into it narrower than that into the synagogue, but they insisted that there was no way in but through the synagogue. By all means said they, let

Gentiles come, but they must first become Jews by submitting to circumcision and living as Jews do. Thus, they did not attack Peter for preaching to the Roman centurion and his men but for eating with them. That eating not only was a breach of the law, but it implied the reception of Cornelius and his company into the household of God, and so destroyed the whole fabric of Jewish exclusiveness.”

Hughes writes, “Mahatma Gandhi shares in his autobiography that in his student days in England he was deeply touched by reading the Gospels and seriously considered becoming a convert to Christianity, which seemed to offer a real solution to the caste system that divided the people of India. One Sunday, he attended church services and decided to ask the minister for enlightenment on salvation and other doctrines. But when Gandhi entered the sanctuary, the ushers refused to give him a seat and suggested that he go elsewhere to worship with his own people. He left and never came back. ‘If Christians have caste differences also,’ he said to himself, ‘I might as well remain a Hindu!’” Hughes says, “The future world leader had read the New Testament and had even seriously considered Christianity, but his conclusion was, ‘I like the New Testament, I like your Christianity, but I do not like your Christians.’”

The Explanation

The Vision “But Peter explained *it* to them in order from the beginning, saying ‘I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision, an object descending like a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came to me. When I observed it intently and considered, I saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air’” (11:4-6). Peter explained himself by beginning with the vision he received in Joppa and giving the details of what happened in chronological order. His description is brief, but it is complete (Alexander). On the one hand, Peter is relating to what happened. On the other hand, he is not just giving information; he is arguing that what happened was God’s doing.

The Voice “And I heard a voice saying to me, ‘Rise, Peter; kill and eat’” (11:7). Peter not only saw a vision, he heard a voice. The voice he heard told him to kill the animals he saw in the sheet and eat them.

“But I said, ‘Not so, Lord! For nothing common or unclean has at any time entered my mouth’” (11:8). Because the animals Peter saw in the vision were unclean, that is, according to the Mosaic Law, they were not to be eaten, Peter objected. He insisted no unclean animal had ever entered his mouth.

“But the voice answered me again from heaven, ‘What God has cleansed you must not call common’” (11:9). The voice from heaven informed Peter that God had made these animals ceremonially clean and, therefore, he should partake of them.

“Now this was done three times, and all were drawn up again into heaven” (11:10). Because Peter was slowed to get the message, it had to be repeated three times.

The Visitors “At that very moment, three men stood before the house where I was, having been sent to me from Caesarea” (11:11). No sooner was the vision concluded than three visitors from Caesarea knocked on the door.

“Then the Spirit told me to go with them, doubting nothing. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered the man’s house” (11:12). The Holy Spirit told Peter to go with them without doubting. The Greek word translated “doubt” means “to separate,” hence, “to distinguish, discriminate, decide, dispute, to be divided in one’s mind, to hesitate, doubt.” In appears in Acts 10:20, where it means making distinctions, which is the way it is used here. Peter

was not to make any distinction between Jews and Gentiles, that is, he was not to treat the Gentiles differently than the Jews; they were not to be treated as second-class citizens (Marshall).

So, Peter and six believers from Joppa accompanied the visitors back to Caesarea. Barclay says, “Peter says that he took six brethren with him. Seven people were present, together with himself. In Egyptian law, which the Jews would know well, seven witnesses were necessary to completely prove a case. In Roman law, which they would also know well, seven seals were necessary to authenticate a really important document. So Peter is, in effect, saying, ‘I am not arguing with you. I am telling you the facts; of these facts, there are seven witnesses. The case is proved.’”

The Visitation “And he told us how he had seen an angel standing in his house, who said to him, ‘Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon whose surname is Peter who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved’ (11:13-14). Peter related that Cornelius told him he had seen an angel. The angel informed Cornelius that he should send for Peter, who would give him the message of salvation.

“And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning” (11:15). As Peter began to speak, there was a visitation of the Holy Spirit, as there was on the believer at Jerusalem at the beginning. In the Greek text, the Holy Spirit is emphatic (Alexander). The beginning refers to “the beginning of the Christian dispensation or the Christian church, which dates from the effusion of the Holy Ghost at that time” (Alexander). It is a reference to the Day of Pentecost (Marshall).

Wiersbe makes the interesting observation that “Peter had to go *all the way back to Pentecost* to find an example of what happened in the home of Cornelius! This suggests that a dramatic ‘baptism of the Spirit’ (v. 16), accompanied by speaking in tongues, was not an everyday occurrence in the early church. Peter could not use the experience of the Samaritans as his example because the Samaritans received the gift of the Spirit by laying on the apostles’ hands (8:14-17). Cornelius and his household received the Spirit the moment they trusted Christ. This is the pattern for today.”

“Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, ‘John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit’” (11:16). When the Holy Spirit fell on Cornelius’s household, Peter remembered that the Lord had said that while John baptized with water, they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit (1:5).

“If therefore God gave them the same gift as *He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?*” (11:17). Peter concludes by arguing that if God gave them the Holy Spirit, who was he to argue with God. The vision, the voice from heaven, the visitors, and the visitation of the Holy Spirit vindicated Peter. It was not what he said but what God did that vindicated him (Alexander). Peter is arguing that independent of him and in total opposition to his previous opinions and desires God Himself did this (Alexander). “Do your duty and let God handle the consequence” (Stonewall Jackson).

The point of all of this is that circumcision and the keeping of the Law were not necessary for salvation. There is also the “wider implications that the Jewish distinction between clean and unclean foods and people was obsolete” (Marshall).

Hughes reminds us that Jonah’s “bad attitude toward the world is what landed him in the belly of the great fish. God was saying to him, ‘Jonah, this is what I think of your self-will, your prejudice, your elitism. Take a good look.’” Hughes adds, “In Christ, there is no basis for discrimination of any kind. Prejudice or elitism on the lips of a believer is an obscenity—whether

it be racial, national, cultural, or social.” Hughes also says that when we become unchangeable and inflexible, we become unusable. “What are our attitudes toward others? Exclusive—pessimistic—passive? Or concerned—hopeful—actively loving?”

The Response

Silence “When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, ‘Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life’” (11:18). When those who were objecting heard Peter’s explanation, they were silent concerning their opposition.

Change of Mind Moreover, they relinquished the position they had taken and conceded that God had worked in the lives of the Gentiles, granting them the opportunity to repent so that they could have eternal life. Bruce says that God bestowed His blessing on the Gentiles—giving them through his Spirit a change of mind and heart and the assurance of eternal life, was a matter for wonder and praise.”

When Peter preached to those assembled in Cornelius’ house, he did not tell them to repent; he told them to believe (10:43). Yet the believers in Jerusalem said the Gentile repented. In other words, while there is a difference between belief and repentance, there is an overlap, so to believe is to repent and to repent is to believe.

Summary: Peter defended his part in the Gentiles receiving salvation without being circumcised by explaining that God supernaturally did it. It was the unmistakable work of God.

God emphasizes this issue. This story is recorded twice, once in chapter 10 and once in chapter 11. Barclay observes, “The importance that Luke attached to this incident is shown by the amount of space he devoted to it. In ancient times, a writer had by no means unlimited space. The book form had not come into use. Writers used rolls of a material called papyrus, which was the forerunner of paper and was made of the papyrus plant’s pith, a bulrush. Now, a roll is an unwieldy thing and the longest roll that was used was about thirty-five feet long, which would be almost precisely the length required to hold the book of *Acts*. Into that space, Luke had almost endless material to fit. He must have selected with the greatest care what he would set down; yet he finds the story of Peter and Cornelius of such importance that he relates it in full twice. Luke was right. We usually do not realize how near Christianity was to becoming only another kind of Judaism. All the first Christians were Jews and the whole tradition and outlook of Judaism would have moved them to keep this new wonder to themselves and to believe that God could not possibly have meant it for the Gentiles. Luke sees this incident as a notable milestone on the road along which the Church was groping its way to the conception of a world for Christ.”

God does not want believers to practice elitism. This incident illustrates the early disciples’ slowness in understanding the Great Commission’s plain words. Peter required vision to open his eyes, and even then, he violated what he had learned (Gal. 2:11-13). Rackham points out that in foreign missions, it is still difficult for believers to recognize the equality of the converted races, and, at the time he wrote, there were practically two churches in America, one black and one white. He concludes, “It is hard to believe that the principle of God to not have respect of persons has been fully realized as yet.”

Wiersbe says, “Christians are to receive one another and not dispute over cultural differences or minor matters of personal conviction (Rom. 14-15). Some of the Jewish Christians in the early church wanted the Gentiles to become Jews, and some of the Gentile believers wanted the Jews to stop being Jews and become Gentiles! This attitude can create serious division in the church

even today, so we must follow the example of Acts 11:18 and the warning of Romans 14:1, and receive those whom God has also received.”

God wants all to come to Christ by faith for salvation. Wiersbe points out that the Ethiopian was a descendent of Ham (in Gen. 10:6, Cush refers to Ethiopia), Saul is a descendent of Shem, and the centurion is a descendent of Japheth.

To receive the forgiveness of sin, first, recognize you are a sinner who needs forgiveness. Ray C. Stedman, Pastor of the Peninsula Bible Church, tells of a young man who came to his church. Stedman says, “He was not accustomed to attending church—he had not been raised in a church at all—but his heart was hungry. He came here not knowing what we would be like. His idea of Christians was that they were a sort of super-snoobish people who self-righteously felt they were better than others. I happened to be speaking on First Corinthians 6 and read these verses: “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you” (1 Cor. 6:9-11 RSV). For some reason, that morning I stopped there and said, ‘How many in this congregation belong in this category? How many have ever been guilty of some of the things that are listed in these verses?’ And I read them again. All over the congregation, hands began to rise. This young man took a look around, saw this forest of hands, and said to himself, ‘These are my kind of people!’”

MINISTERING TO ONE ANOTHER

According to the New Testament, all believers, not just the “Pastor,” should be “in the ministry.” What does that look like? Precisely, what is the Pastor’s job and what is your job? The Pastor’s job is to equip the saint for their work of the ministry (Eph. 4:11-12). The Pastor does that by preaching the Word (2 Tim. 3:16-4:5). What is the ministry of believers?

The Scattered

Scattering “Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only” (11:19). At this point, Luke goes back to the persecution that arose at the time of Stephen (8:1; Rackham; Marshall). As a result of the persecution, Jewish believers were scattered as far as Phoenicia (modern Lebanon), Cyprus (the home of Barnabas—4:36), and Antioch (300 miles north of Jerusalem—Wiersbe), but as they went, they preached the Word, which here is a reference to the gospel (11:20-21).

Antioch was the third-largest city in the Roman Empire, after Rome and Alexandria (Bruce). It was the capital of the Roman province of Syria, which had a population of 500,000 and a large number of Jews (Marshall). It was the second most important city in the Roman world; only Rome itself was more influential” (Kelso, p. 36). It was also a wicked city, perhaps second only to Corinth. The worship of Daphne included immoral practices (Wiersbe).

Barclay explains, “Antioch was the third greatest city in the world next to Rome and Alexandria. She stood near the mouth of the river Orontes, fifteen miles from the Mediterranean Sea. She was lovely and cosmopolitan, but she was a byword for luxurious immorality. She was famous for her chariot racing and for a kind of deliberate pursuit of pleasure that went on literally night and day, but most of all she was famous for the worship of Daphne, whose temple stood five miles out of the town amidst its laurel groves. The legend was that Daphne was a mortal maid with whom Apollo fell in love. He pursued her and for her safety, Daphne was changed into a laurel bush. The priestesses of the Temple of Daphne were sacred prostitutes and nightly in the laurel groves, the pursuit was re-enacted by the worshippers and the priestesses. ‘The morals of Daphne’ was a phrase that all the world knew for loose living. It seems incredible but nonetheless, it is true that it was in a city like this that Christianity took the great stride forward to becoming the religion of the world. We need only think of that to be reminded that no situation is hopeless.”

God’s light shines in the darkest places.

Evangelizing “But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus” (11:20). There is a textual problem in this verse that affects the interpretation of this passage. The majority of the manuscripts read “Hellenist” (MT and B), that is, Jewish believers. A few manuscripts read “Greeks” (CT, A), that is, Gentiles. Commentators who follow the Critical Text conclude that this is saying the gospel was preached to the Gentiles (Rackham; Bruce; Marshall). Assuming the reading of the majority of manuscripts, Luke says some of the scattered Jewish believers settled in Antioch, where they preached the gospel to the Hellenists, that is, Greek-speaking Jews

(Alexander, who says they preached exclusively to the Jews). By the way, Nicolas, one of the seven, was a proselyte from Antioch (6:5). Hodges concludes that this is not the founding of the Gentile church but the founding of a church whose viewpoint is an extension of Stephen, Philip, and the Jerusalem Hellenist. He even suggests that since Barnabas was a Cyprian by birth, he may have been a Hellenist.

“And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord” (11:21). The “hand of the Lord” is a figurative expression of His power (Alexander). As a result of the preaching of the gospel and the power of God, many were converted. The scattered evangelized. In this case, evangelism was not done by the apostles, the elders, the deacons, or because of some ecclesiastical structure. It was believers sharing the gospel with unbelievers. Pointing out that these men are not named, Barclay says, “It has always been one of the tragedies of the church that men have wished to be noticed and named when they did something worthwhile.” He adds, “These men may not have written their names in men’s books of history, but they have written them forever in God’s Book of Life.”

Barnabas

The Mission “Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch” (11:22). When the church in Jerusalem heard that people were coming to the Lord in Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch (11:19), they sent Barnabas to minister in these places (Alexander). Apparently, the leaders of the Jerusalem Church considered themselves responsible for the direction of the movement (Bruce). Earlier, they sent Peter and John to Samaria (8:14). This time, they sent Barnabas, an apostle of the church. Why did they not send apostles? Perhaps the apostles were preaching the gospel elsewhere. Wiersbe suggests the apostles were out of town and the elders sent Barnabas to Antioch. Barnabas was generous (4:36-37). He was a reconciler (9:27). He has been described as a sensitive, empathic, gracious, cheerful, big-hearted, loving man (Hughes).

The Ministry “When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord” (11:23). When Barnabas saw the grace of God in people being converted, he was glad and, true to his name, he encouraged them to continue with the Lord with the purpose of heart. The Greek word translated “continue” means “to remain with, to remain attached to, cleave to, abide in” (The KJV says, cleave and the NASB says, “resolute heart to remain *true* to the Lord”). It is used in Acts 13:43 in the phrase “continue in the grace of God.” Wiersbe says that it includes loving the Lord, walking in His ways, obeying His Word, and serving Him wholeheartedly. The Greek word rendered “purpose” is used for the purpose of God (Rom. 8:28; 9:11; Eph. 1:11; 3:11).

The Man “For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord” (11:24). At this point, Luke gives a reason or explanation (“for”) for something, but what? Alexander says possibilities that have been suggested include the reason for the choice of Barnabas, the reason for his exhortation, and the reason for his rejoicing. Instead of finding fault or doubting, Barnabas rejoiced because he was a good man (Alexander). Barnabas’s goodness resulted from the influence of the Holy Spirit and his faith (Alexander).

As a result of the work of Barnabas, many came to the Lord. Wiersbe says, “When saints are grounded in the Word, they will have a strong witness to the lost, and there will be a balance in the church between edification and evangelism, worship and witness, teaching and testifying.”

Barnabas encouraged. We need encouragement in every area of our life, but that is especially true spiritually. Spiritual encouragement encourages people to continue in God's grace, follow the Lord regardless of opposition, and minister to others. The principles of ministry in Hebrews 10:24-25 apply to those who need encouragement: 1. Be there. 2. Listen. 3. Encourage. You can minister to them by letting them know that you believe they can do whatever they need to do. That will give them the courage to do it. Someone has said, "The human spirit soars with hope when lifted by a word of encouragement."

Paul

Sought "Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul" (11:25). Such a great number had turned to the Lord (11:21) that Barnabas needed a "suitable assistant" (Alexander). Paul did not send for Nicolas, who was from Antioch (6:5); he sought Paul. Barnabas had not seen Paul for 8 to 10 years (Hughes). Paul had a "brilliantly honed, razor-sharp lawyer's intellect" (Hughes).

Taught "And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people" (11:26a). When Barnabas and Paul returned to Antioch, they taught a large number of people for one solid year. What a Bible class that must have been!

"And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (11:26b). The word "disciples" here refers to those who were being taught (11:26). Those who were following the Lord began to be called "Christians." The first time that happened was at Antioch. "Christian" only appears thrice in the New Testament (11:26; 26:28; 1 Pet. 4:16).

Christian was not a name that the disciples chose for themselves. It was a nickname given to them by others. The ending of the word "Christian" indicates that this tag was given to them by the Romans, not the Jews or Greeks (Alexander). Bruce suggests that the pagans of Antioch gave the disciples this name because it was the name of the person about whom they were always talking. He adds they were the Christ-people, the Christians, just as the adherents of the Herod dynasty were called Herodians. In the mouth of Agrippa (26:28), it is a term of reproach, like Nazarene (Rackham). Marshall uses the term "Christ-people" and says that it is likely that the name contained an element of ridicule (26:28; 1 Pet. 4:16). He adds Christians themselves preferred other names for themselves, such as "disciples, saints, and brothers."

Barclay explains, "The people of Antioch were famous for their facility in finding jesting nicknames. Later, the bearded Emperor Julian came to visit them and they christened him "The Goat." The termination *-iani* means *belonging to the party of*; for instance, *Caesariani* means *belonging to Caesar's party*. Christian means *These Christ-folk*. It was a contemptuous nickname, but the Christians took it and made it known to all the world. By their lives, they made it a name not of contempt but of respect and admiration and even wonder."

In 1640, George Fox stood before Justice Bennett and "bid him to tremble at the word of the Lord. In response, the justice called Fox and his followers "Quakers." Something similar happened to the Methodists, who were named because of this systematic, methodical pursuit of holiness (Hughes). What word best describes you?

Today, some consider themselves Christians because they are not "pagans" (Wiersbe). Some think that everyone who is not a Jew or a Muslim is a Christian. Harry Ironside handed a gospel booklet to a man on a train. The man asked, "Why did you give me that booklet?" Ironside replied, "I thought you might be interested. May I ask, are you a Christian?" "Well," he replied

indignantly, take a good look at me. Do I look like a Jew or a China Man?” Ironside replied, “You look like an American. “Then,” he responded, “That is your answer.”

The distinguishing characteristic of Christians should be love. Jesus says, “By this, all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn. 13:35). The way we love one another is we minister to one another. Paul says, “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another” (Gal. 5:13).

Agabus

The Prophets “And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch” (11:27). After Barnabas (11:22), prophets came from Jerusalem. A prophet was one who received messages directly from the Lord (Num. 12:6), whereas teachers get their message from a study of the Word (Wiersbe). The Gift of prophet does not exist today (Eph. 2:20).

The Prophecy “Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar” (11:28). One of the prophets, a man named Agabus, who is only mentioned here and in Acts 21:10, prophesied that a worldwide famine would come during the reign of Claudius. Alexander lists various famines during the reign of Claudius. For example, Josephus, Eusebius, and Orosius said there was a famine in Jerusalem in Claudius’s fourth, fifth, and sixth years. Alexander says that the local famines succeeded one another so rapidly they may be considered together as constituting one continuous whole-empire famine. Rackham says that Josephus confirmed there was a severe famine in Palestine at several intervals between AD 44 and AD 48 (see also Bruce). Evidently, Agabus did not mean there would be a world-wide famine all at one time because the church at Antioch sent money to Jerusalem (11:29). If Agabus had predicted a worldwide famine all at one time, the church at Antioch might have used that money locally.

The Result “Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea” (11:29). According to their financial ability, the disciples at Antioch sent money to the brethren in Judea so that they could buy food to store up for the coming famine (Marshall). Antioch did not forget Jerusalem. Wiersbe says the pattern of giving today is not Acts 4:34 but Acts 11:29.

“This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul” (11:30). This is the first appearance of elders in the books of Acts. When the church began, it was led by the apostles (6:2, 6). Marshall makes the intriguing suggestion that, perhaps, the “seven” (6:1-6) became elders. Elders functioned alongside the apostles (15:4, 6, 22 ff., 16:4; 21:18), but evidently, the church began to be ruled by elders. Ultimately, even Peter (1 Pet. 5:1) and John (2 Jn.; 3 Jn. 1) identified themselves as elders, not apostles.

According to Acts, this is Paul’s second visit to Jerusalem (9:26-30). The famine visit recorded here is identical to the one described in Galatians 2:1-10 (Bruce; Marshall).

Agabus enlightened. The result was giving.

Summary: Ministering to others includes evangelism, encouragement, education, and enlightenment.

In the overall scheme of things, the center of Christianity is slowly shifting from Jerusalem to Antioch (Rackham) and the leadership, at least among the Gentiles, is moving from Peter to Paul.

Believers should come to church to minister to each other. Early in the 18th century, two young monks were disciplined for an infraction of the monastery rules. The Abbott told them, “Brothers Benedict and Fidelis, your punishment will be seclusion for three months—under the rule of silence!” They were only allowed to utter aloud the prayer: “Dixit Dominus Domino Meo.” At first, they gave themselves to prayer and study, but the idle hours weighed heavily on them. Finally, they gathered 28 smooth flat stones from the courtyard and placed different numbers on each of them. They used the stone to devise a new game. Using gestures, they developed rules to govern their play. The most difficult thing for them was keeping silent when they were excited over winning a game. Then they had an idea. By reducing the one-line prayer they were allowed to pray out loud, the victor was able to signal his triumph by excitedly exclaiming, ‘Domino! Domino!’ The game has been refined, but it is still played today” (*Our Daily Bread*, 1/9/1966).

Imagine, while others thought these two pious men were at prayer, they were actually playing a game! When we come to church, others might think we are pious, but if we are not ministering to others, we are playing church.

WHERE IS GOD WHEN...?

If you have walked with the Lord for any length of time, you have no doubt had a time when you asked, “Where is God?” During those times, it seems as if God is absent, on vacation, or not answering the phone. How do you handle such situations? An episode recorded in Acts 12 illustrates the answer to that question.

The Persecution of Herod

Martyrdom “Now about that time Herod the king stretched out *his* hand to harass some from the church” (12:1). The expression “about this time” connects this chapter with the last one. What is recorded here happened when Barnabas and Paul went to Jerusalem (11:30). Also note that the believers at Jerusalem are described as one church (Alexander).

The Herod of Acts 12 was the grandson of Herod the Great, who ordered the Bethlehem children murdered (Mt. 2:16) and the nephew of Herod Antipas (Wiersbe), who had John the Baptist beheaded (see Mt. 14:1-10, where he is called “Herod, the tetrarch”). The Herod mentioned here was the “elder Herod Agrippa” (Bruce), “Herod Agrippa I” (Marshall). His father killed his brother (Hughes). Josephus describes him as “a mild and liberal, but ambitious prince” (Alexander). In 37 AD, Gaius bestowed upon him the title of king (Bruce). The Greek word translated “harass” means “to ill-treat, afflict, distress.”

The Mishnah relates that at the Feast of Tabernacles, probably in 41 AD, Herod, weeping publicly, read Deuteronomy 17:14-20, which contains the words, “You may not put a foreigner over you, who is not your brother.” The people responded, “Be not dismayed; you are indeed our brother!” (see Bruce). Herod was motivated to please the Jews. He tried to curry their favor by executing James and attempting to do the same to Peter (Marshall).

Barclay says Herod “sedulously cultivated the good graces of the Jewish people by meticulously keeping the Law and all Jewish observances. For these reasons, he was popular with the people, and it was no doubt that to achieve further popularity with the Orthodox Jews, he decided to attack the Christian Church and its leaders. Even his conduct in the arrest of Peter shows his desire to conciliate the Jews.” He adds, “The great tragedy of this particular wave of persecution was that it was not due to any man’s principles, however misguided; it was due simply to Herod’s bid to gain popular favor with the people.” The fact that a ruler can hold popularity by persecuting the church is a far cry from the state of affairs recorded in Acts 2:47, 4:21, 5:13 (Hodges).

“Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword” (12:2). Peter, James, and John were in the inner circle of the apostles. James and John were brothers. One of the two brothers was the first of the apostles to die and the other was the last. Herod killed James with the sword, which probably means by decapitation (Alexander). The Jerusalem Church did not replace James as they had replaced Judas (1:15-24; Wiersbe).

Imprisonment “And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also. Now it was *during* the Days of Unleavened Bread” (12:3). When Herod saw that executing James pleased “the Jews,” that is, the people (Alexander), he had Peter arrested. He decided to strike a decisive blow at the church by slaying its ringleader (Rackham). The Feast of

Unleavened Bread, during which leaven was forbidden (Lev. 23:6-8; Ex. 12:15-20; 13:6-8; Deut. 16:3-8), followed the Passover and lasted seven days. Bruce thinks Peter was arrested at the beginning of the Feast.

“So when he had arrested him, he put *him* in prison, and delivered *him* to four squads of soldiers to keep him, intending to bring him before the people after Passover” (12:4). The expression “four squads” was a technical term for a unit of Roman soldiers. Four were needed, one for each watch during the night. Even though Peter was arrested during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Luke says Herod would bring Peter to trial after *Passover* because the Feast of Unleavened Bread was so connected to Pentecost that they were considered one (Marshall). In other words, the word “Passover” is used in a broad sense throughout the whole period, beginning with Passover and extending through the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Bruce).

“Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church” (12:5). While Peter was in prison, probably for several days, the church interceded on his behalf. The Greek word translated “constant” means “stretched, strained,” metaphorically, “earnest, zealous” (the Critical Text has the adverb, which means “fervently, earnestly”). According to Alexander, it does not denote extent in time (unceasing), but intensity. It was a fervent prayer that lasted for several days (Marshall), possibly a week (see comments on 12:3 and Wiersbe).

The believers at Jerusalem were probably asking, “Where is God in all of this? The one thing they did was pray. If one of our closest friends was about to be executed, we would pray—fervently. We pray in a crisis.

Chuck Swindoll writes in his book *Encourage Me*, “The following incident took place in 1968 on an airliner bound for New York. It was a routine flight and normally a boring affair. The kind of flights I like—uneventful. But this one proved to be otherwise. Descending to the destination, the pilot realized the landing gear refused to engage. He worked the controls back and forth, trying, again and again, to make the gear lock down into place. No success. He then asked the control tower for instructions as he circled the landing field. Responding to the crisis, airport personnel sprayed the runway with foam as fire trucks and other emergency vehicles moved into position. Disaster was only minutes away. The passengers, meanwhile, were told of each maneuver in that calm, cheery voice pilots manage to use at times like this. Flight attendants glided about the cabin with an air of cool reserve. Passengers were told to place their heads between their knees and grab their ankles just before impact. It was one of those I-can’t-believe-this-is-happening-to-me experiences. There were tears, no doubt, and a few screams of despair. The landing was now seconds away. Suddenly, the pilot announced over the intercom: ‘We are beginning our final descent. At this moment, in accordance with International Aviation Codes established at Geneva, it is my obligation to inform you that if you believe in God, you should commence prayer.’ I’m happy to report that the belly landing occurred without a hitch. No one was injured and, aside from some rather extensive damage to the plane, the airline hardly remembered the incident. In fact, a relative of one of the passengers called the airline the very next day and asked about the prayer rule the pilot had quoted. No one volunteered any information on the subject. Back to that cool reserve, it was simply, ‘No comment.’ Amazing. The only thing that brought out into the open a deep-down ‘secret rule’ was a crisis. Pushed to the brink, back to the wall, right up to the wire, all escape routes closed ... only then does our society crack open a hint of recognition that God just might be there and ‘if you believe ... you should commence prayer.’”

The Release of Peter

The Chains of Peter “And when Herod was about to bring him out, that night Peter was sleeping, bound with two chains between two soldiers; and the guards before the door were keeping the prison” (12:6). The night before Herod intended to bring Peter to trial, Peter was chained to two soldiers, one on each side. Guards were stationed at the door of the prison. Nevertheless, Peter enjoyed a good night’s sleep, suggesting he was calm and composed. Peter was “untroubled by the thoughts of what he expected to happen the next day” (Marshall).

Think about that. Jesus told Peter, “Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry *you* where you do not wish” (Jn. 21:18). Perhaps, Peter thought that his time had come. Moreover, James, the first apostle to be martyred, had just been killed. Yet, Peter sleeps soundly. Bruce says Peter was awakened from “the calm sleep that springs from a good conscience and quiet confidence and God.” If you were chained to two Roman soldiers and facing the possibility of being executed the next day, would you sleep at all, much less soundly? David wrote, “I will both lie down in peace, and sleep; For You alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety” (Ps. 4:8; see Isa. 41:10).

The Commands of the Angel “Now behold, an angel of the Lord stood by *him*, and a light shone in the prison; and he struck Peter on the side and raised him up, saying, ‘Arise quickly!’ And his chains fell off *his* hands. Then the angel said to him, ‘Gird yourself and tie on your sandals’; and so he did. And he said to him, ‘Put on your garment and follow me’” (12:7-8). Apparently, the angel of the Lord and the light appeared in the prison without the soldiers being aware of what was happening. The angel woke Peter up and told him to get dressed quickly. The chains fell off Peter’s hands. Peter woke up to a miracle, having an angel for an alarm clock (Wiersbe). The angel did not do for Peter what Peter could do for himself. Those things beyond Peter’s ability, namely, the chains, was done for him.

“So he went out and followed him, and did not know that what was done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision” (12:9). Throughout the whole ordeal, Peter thought he was dreaming! He was only half-awake (Bruce).

“When they were past the first and the second guard posts, they came to the iron gate that leads to the city, which opened to them of its own accord; and they went out and went down one street, and immediately the angel departed from him” (12:10). The angel led Peter pass two guard posts and the iron gate of the prison, which opened of its own accord. Perhaps the guards at the first two posts were sleeping (Marshall). Or Peter might have been taken as a servant as he passed the first two guard posts, but no servant would be expected to go beyond the outermost gate, so a different course was needed there (Bruce). Once outside the prison, they turned down one street. Then, the angel disappeared. Wiersbe makes the interesting comment, “His work was done and now it was up to Peter to trust the Lord and use his common sense in taking the next step.”

The Realization of Peter “And when Peter had come to himself, he said, ‘Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent His angel, and has delivered me from the hand of Herod and *from* all the expectation of the Jewish people’” (12:11). After the departure of the angel, Peter realized that the Lord had delivered him from Herod and the expectations of the people that he would be executed (Alexander).

The Entrance of Peter “So, when he had considered *this*, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying” (12:12).

The house to which Peter went is described as the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark. Mary is described as the mother of John Mark either because John Mark became part of the story of Acts or because Luke readers would be more familiar with believers of the second generation than those of the first (Bruce, who says see Mk. 15:21). Mary was a relative of Barnabas (Col. 4:10—John Mark, Mary’s son, was the nephew to Barnabas). It has been conjectured that Mary’s house was the scene of the Last Supper (Edersheim, *The Life and Times of the Messiah*, vol. II, p. 485.) and the house where the disciples gathered at Pentecost, but, as Marshall points out, there is no positive evidence in favor of that possibility. At this point, she was a widow (Alexander).

John (a Jewish name) Mark (a Roman name) was the nephew of Barnabas (Col. 4:10). He was probably the fellow who followed the Lord the night He was arrested (Mk 14:51-52). Peter calls Mark his son, which has been taken figuratively, as Peter’s spiritual son (Alexander), a “natural expression of affection between Apostle and pupil” (Selwyn on 1 Pet. 5:13) or a “close associate and assistant” (Grudem on 1 Pet. 5:13). Papias closely connects Peter with John Mark during the later years of Peter’s life.

When Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch from their visit to Jerusalem, they took John Mark with them (12:25). They also took him on the first missionary journey, but in the middle of the tour, John Mark left them. As a result, Paul and Barnabas separated over him just before the second missionary journey (Acts 15:37-39). Twelve years later, Paul indicates that the church of Colossae had received some instructions concerning John Mark (Col. 4:10). At the end of his life, Paul says only John Mark was with him (2 Tim. 4:11). “An old and uniform tradition” says Mark wrote the Gospel, which bears his name (Alexander). Tradition says that he went to Egypt as a missionary and founded the church at Alexandria.

This is the first all-night prayer meeting (12:18). Apparently, this was an informal meeting (Rackham), for none of the leaders were present (12:17).

“And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a girl named Rhoda came to answer.” When she recognized Peter’s voice, because of *her* gladness she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter stood before the gate” (12:13-14). When Rhoda heard Peter knocking at the gate and asked who was there, she recognized his voice. She either knew him as a friend (Wiersbe) or had heard him preach (Matthew Henry).

“But they said to her, ‘You are beside yourself!’ Yet she kept insisting that it was so. So, they said, ‘It is his angel!’” (12:15). At first, the people in the house thought Rhoda was crazy. When she insisted that it was Peter, they brushed her off, saying she had seen his angel.

This verse and Matthew 18:10 are the basis for the idea that everyone has a guardian angel. Perhaps this verse reflects the Jewish idea that individuals have a guardian angel (Rackham). There is some evidence, much later than the New Testament, that guardian angels were thought to bear the image of the person they protected (Marshall). Or, maybe, this means, as we would say, “his ghost” (Rackham). As Wiersbe points out, “The logical question is, ‘Why would an angel bother to knock?’”

“Now Peter continued knocking; and when they opened *the door* and saw him, they were astonished” (12:16). In the meantime, Peter was banging at the gate. When the people finally opened the gate and saw that it really was Peter, they were astonished (2:7; 12; 8:9, 11, 13; 9:21; 10:45). Wiersbe remarks, “When you remember that (a) many people were praying, (b) they were praying earnestly, (c) they prayed night and day for perhaps as long as a week, and (d) their prayers were centered specifically on Peter’s deliverance, then the scene that is described here is almost comical. The answer to their prayers is standing at the door, but they don’t have enough

faith to open the door and let him in! God could get Peter out of prison, but Peter can't get himself into a prayer meeting!"

The Message of Peter "But motioning to them with his hand to keep silent, he declared to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, 'Go, tell these things to James and to the brethren.' And he departed and went to another place" (12:17). At that point, everyone began talking. Peter had to motion to them to keep quiet to explain what had happened. Then, he instructed them to tell James and the brethren what had happened. This James has been identified as James, the son Alpheus (Alexander), and James, the half-brother of Jesus (Rackham; Marshall). James, the half-brother of Jesus, was the leader of the church in Jerusalem (15:13; 21:18) and the author of the book of James, but nothing is known of how he came to occupy that position rather than one of the twelve apostles (Marshall). In light of James's martyrdom and Peter's imprisonment, all of the apostles were probably in hiding (Marshall). Barclay says, "In the East, it would have been the natural thing for the next brother to take on the work of an elder brother who had been killed." The brethren could be church members (Marshall), but they have also been taken to be elders (Rackham). Bruce calls them "fellow elders," indicating he thinks James was an elder.

Peter departed to an unnamed place. The Roman Catholic Church claims and at this point, Peter went to Rome, where he established a church, but there is no proof of that (Rackham says Peter went to Rome to hide there). It is unlikely that Peter went to Rome at this time because Paul did not mention him when he wrote Romans (Alexander). McBirnie contends that Peter went to the city of Babylon and was there from AD 44-49. He points out that the tradition of Eastern churches is united that Peter went to Babylon. They trace their lineage to Babylon and to Peter (McBirnie, pp. 56-57, 62-63). He no doubt went to someplace outside Herod's jurisdiction (Rackham). At any rate, he went underground so successfully that, to this day, no one has discovered where he went (Bruce).

Thomas Watson, a Puritan preacher, said, "The angel fetched Peter out of prison, but it was prayer that fetched the angel." God answers prayer, sometimes to our great surprise.

A Christian lady described a situation in her life that was the Lord's doing, but when Patricia mentioned that the Lord did it, the lady did not get it! Sometimes the Lord is working and we do not get it.

The Reaction of Herod

The Death of Soldiers "Then, as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers about what had become of Peter" (12:18). Peter was miraculously delivered from prison sometime during the night. When it was light, the soldiers discovered him missing, which created no small stir among them.

"But when Herod had searched for him and not found him, he examined the guards and commanded that *they* should be put to death. And he went down from Judea to Caesarea, and stayed *there*" (12:19). When Herod Agrippa found out that Peter was missing, he ordered a search that came up empty-handed. After a court-martial (Rackham), he commanded the guards be executed. According to Roman military law, if a Roman soldier allowed a prisoner to escape, he suffered the punishment the prisoner would have received (Bruce; Barclay). For a soldier to fall asleep at his post was a capital offense (Alexander). The Roman rules did not strictly apply to Herod's jurisdiction. Herod did not have to kill the guards, being a Herod, he did it anywhere (Wiersbe). Herod left for his Palace at Caesarea (Rackham), the seat of the government of Judea

under the Romans (Bruce; Marshall). Josephus says Herod went to Caesarea to celebrate the games in honor of the emperor.

The Death of Herod “Now Herod had been very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; but they came to him with one accord, and having made Blastus the king’s personal aide their friend, they asked for peace, because their country was supplied with food by the king’s country” (12:20). Before explaining what happened to Herod, Luke relays some background information. For some unknown reason, Herod is angry with Tyre and Sidon’s people. This was serious for the people of Phoenicia’s two great cities. They occupied a narrow strip of sea coastland. Since they had no interior farmland, they depended on their neighbors, especially Palestine, for food. They bribed Blastus, Herod’s personal aide (Rackham; Wiersbe). Through him, they obtained a meeting with Herod. Whatever that cost, it was worth the price (Bruce).

“So on a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat on his throne and gave an oration to them” (12:21). At the time of the appointed meaning, Herod showed up wearing royal appeal. He sat on his throne and gave an oration. Josephus says this occurred on the second day of Herod’s games. He describes the royal appeal as a silver dress, richly adorned with silver lace and embroidery or made of silver tissue. He also describes the scene as taking place in the theatre at Caesarea (Alexander).

“And the people kept shouting, ‘The voice of a god and not of a man!’” (12:22). In response to Herod’s speech, the people continuously shouted that Herod was a god, not a mere mortal. Josephus records their words: “Be prosperous! If until now we reverence you as the man, henceforth we acknowledge you superior to mortal nature” (Josephus, *Antique of the Jews*, 19:343-350; see Alexander, Bruce, and Marshall).

“Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died” (12:23). The people of the Roman Empire were accustomed to the deification of their monarchs and the worship of Augustine was spreading throughout the empire, but in this case, Herod was carried away with the flattery (Rackham). Because he did not give God His proper glory, an angel of the Lord struck him (12:7), so he was eaten by worms and died. The expression “eaten by worms” may be literal, although it appears to have been a stock phrase for describing the death of tyrants (Marshall). For possible medical explanations, see Bruce and Marshall. Josephus says Herod saw an owl perched on a rope. He had been told that if it reappeared, he would die within five days. According to Josephus, Herod lingered in agonizing pain for five days and died. Josephus also indicates that this took place in the seventh year of Herod’s reign when he was 54 years old, August 1, AD 44 (Alexander).

Those who exalt themselves and set themselves up against God ultimately perish. “God himself acts against those who usurp his position and claim divine honors for themselves” (Marshall). Wiersbe calls this whole scene idolatry (see Isa. 42:8; 48:11).

A throne on earth may be in control, but the reality is that the throne of heaven is over the thrones on the earth. Instead of Peter being killed by Herod, Herod was killed by Peter’s God! It is possible that the same angel that delivered Peter smote Herod (Rackham; Wiersbe).

The Progression of the Word

The Expansion of the Message “But the word of God grew and multiplied” (12:24). The expression “the word of God” is a reference to the gospel. People continued to come to the Lord (6:7; 9:31; 16:5; 19:20; 28:31). Despite James’s death and Peter’s departure, the work of God continued to expand (Marshall). At the beginning of the chapter, Herod seemed to be in control,

but the church was losing. At the end of the chapter, Herod is dead, and the church, which is very much alive, is growing rapidly (Wiersbe).

The Fulfillment of the Ministry “And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled *their* ministry, and they also took with them John whose surname was Mark” (12:25). Having fulfilled their ministry of the distribution of the offerings for the saints at Jerusalem (11:27-30), Barnabas and Paul return to Antioch, taking John Mark with them. Were Barnabas and Saul in Jerusalem during the time of James’s martyrdom and Peter’s imprisonment? Bruce thinks not. He says that the events of this chapter happened between the prophecy of Agabus and their visit (Bruce, p. 233, fn. 5). He believes that Agrippa was dead by the time they arrived (Bruce, p. 243).

Summary: When the first apostle was martyred and another was imprisoned, God intervened to release the prisoner, punish the persecutor, and promote His work. When it looks like God is not working, He is working through prayer, angels, and believers to accomplish His will in believers and through believers.

God is working in believers. He is working for their best good. While everything is not good, all things work together for good to those who love God (Rom. 8:28). By faith, some “quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again. And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still, others had trials of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, and were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, afflicted, tormented” (Heb. 11:34-37). Those who suffer obtain a better resurrection (Heb. 11:35).

We need to view things from an eternal perspective, not a temporal perspective. The man born blind in John 9 suffered blindness until the Lord healed him, but those few short years are nothing compared to the reward he will receive in eternity. When Louis Talbot was in London, he was taken to the Martyr’s Memorial. In response, he said, “It would be wonderful for a man to die with tears in his eyes, only to open his eyes and find the hand of the Lord Jesus wiping those tears away” (Talbot, pp. 208-09).

God is working through believers. Why are these events recorded in Acts? Marshall discusses how chapter 12 functions in the book as a whole. He writes, “A number of different possibilities arise. At first sight, the story is unnecessary to the developing theme of the expansion of the church; had it been omitted, we should not have noticed the loss. Perhaps the story has been told simply because it formed part of the traditions Luke had inherited about Peter (*cf.* 9:32- 43). It may, however, serve historically to tell how Peter was forced to leave Jerusalem and thus to hand over the leadership of the church to James (although we should note that Peter is still active in the church in Jerusalem in Gal. 2:9 and Acts 15). Another function of the story may be to indicate how Peter’s career ran along lines similar to those of Jesus and Paul: the theme of imprisonment and death (real or threatened) is common to all three. It is less likely that we should trace a deliberate typological parallelism with the story of Jonah, although the evidence for this interpretation has been soberly presented by Williams (pp. 152 ff.). From Luke’s point of view, the emphasis would appear to be on the triumphant progress of the gospel (12:24), which is not hindered by the death of one apostle or the imprisonment of another. When the church prays, the cause of God will go forward, and his enemies will come to naught, even if this does not exempt the church from suffering and martyrdom” (Marshall, p. 206).

Hodges claims Luke is setting the stage for the Gentile mission. At this point in his narrative, Luke returns to Jerusalem because the spiritual situation in Jerusalem justifies the Gentile mission Luke is about to describe. Herod cannot cope with Peter, God's agent, to open the door to the Gentiles. Israel cannot cope with the Gentile mission, which it will seek to restrain (2:24).

The message of the book of Acts is that the Lord is continuing to work by the Holy Spirit through various people. Luke demonstrates that God acted sovereignly to spread His Word to the Gentiles. God grants Gentiles repentance (9:32-11:18). God establishes a church on Gentile soil (11:19-30). God also triumphs over Jerusalem's efforts restraining His Word (12:1-24). The events of Acts 12 demonstrate that God works through James, Peter, Barnabas, and Paul. According to Eusebius, the officer who guarded James became a Christian and was beheaded with him (Bruce, p. 234, fn. 7).

What do we need to know when persecution occurs? Wiersbe suggests that Peter may have had this experience in mind when he quoted Psalm 34:15-16, "For the eyes of the LORD *are* on the righteous, and His ears *are open* to their prayers; but the face of the LORD *is* against those who do evil" (1 Pet. 3:12). Wiersbe divides Acts 12 into three parts: 1) God sees our trials (12:1-4), God hears our prayers (12:15-17), and 3) God deals with our enemies (12:18-25).

Above all, we know that God loves us. "A sorrowing pair of mourners returned from the cemetery after saying the last farewell to the wife and mother. The bereaved husband, holding the hand of his little daughter firmly, made his way back to the home, which now seemed so empty and so dark. They sat together in the room where so many happy hours had been spent; but now all was dismal. It seemed the light of their lives had gone out. That evening, the father tearfully tucked the little one in bed and kissed her goodnight, said to her, 'I'll leave the light on tonight so you won't be afraid in the dark.' 'Oh no, daddy,' she said, 'turn it out, I'm not afraid. When she put out the light, Mommy used to tell me, 'Remember, Honey, Mother loves you in the dark the same as in the light.' That night, as he lay tossing almost despairingly upon his bed and asking, 'Why, why, oh why did this happen.' the words of his trusting child kept ringing in his ears. I Remember. Honey, Mommy loves YOU in the dark.' The little child never asked WHY but went to sleep because mommy loved her even through the black of night. Gradually the darkness faded and he found himself repeating the words of his little daughter, 'Mommy loves you in the dark.' God loves me in the dark as well as in the light. Why should I ask WHY? If He loves me in the dark, He must have a good reason for the darkness so that I may realize His love more. I can rest upon His promise, 'I am with you always.' Always! Light or dark!' And then he fell asleep. Sweet peace!" (MRD, *Our Daily Bread*, 6/8/09).

A LIFE-CHANGING MOMENT

A man once told me about being invited to speak before a large group of teenagers. He had given speeches before, but this was different for several reasons. He had not had a lot of experience speaking to teenagers. Furthermore, he spoke behind a podium where he could place a lot of notes. He was told that he would not have a podium before the teenagers. All of this drove him to prepare more thoroughly than he had ever prepared before for a speech. As a result, his delivery went very well. Years later, he told me that was a life-changing moment for him. Sticking his neck out and experiencing such success gave him more confidence in speaking than before the life-changing moment.

All of us have had such experiences in life. It also happens spiritually. Suppose I told you I can tell you how to have a spiritual life-changing moment rather than just having it happen. You can do something to make it happen. A story in the books of Acts illustrates how this works.

Until now, Jerusalem has been the center of ministry, and Peter has been the key apostle, but from this point on, Antioch in Syria has become the new center, and Paul is the new leader (Wiersbe). During his missionary journeys, churches were established in the Roman provinces of Galatia, Macedonia, and Asia (Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* p. 3) in about nine years. Beyond his missionary journeys, Paul travels to Jerusalem, where he is arrested and eventually taken to Rome. Wiersbe says that at least forty cities are mentioned in Acts and that the record given in Acts 13-28 is “almost a review of ancient geography.”

The Decision at Antioch

A Divine Decision “Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul” (13:1). Hoehner dates the first missionary journey (Acts 13-14) from April AD 48-Spring 49 (see also G. Michael Cocoris, *The Chronology of the Bible*).

Luke begins by listing the prophets and teachers in the church at Antioch. A review of what had happened at Antioch thus far puts this verse in perspective. Believers from Cyprus and Cyrene came to Antioch, “preaching the Lord Jesus” (11:20). As a result, “a great number believed and turned to the Lord” (11:21). When news of that reached the church in Jerusalem, they sent “Barnabas to go as far as Antioch” (11:22). Barnabas was thrilled with what he found and encouraged to “continue with the Lord” (11:23). As a result, “many people were added to the Lord” (11:24). Barnabas sought and brought Saul back to Antioch and for a solid year, the two of them “taught a great many people” (11:25-26). When the church at Antioch heard about a coming famine, they sent money to Jerusalem “by the hands of Barnabas and Saul” (11:30). In other words, at first, Barnabas and, after that, Barnabas and Saul were the main teachers at Antioch. Various prophets from Jerusalem, one of whom was Agabus, visited the church at Antioch (11:27-28). At this point, there are five prophets and teachers at Antioch. Rackham considers these five as “one body of rulers.” Were they elders, or were they different than the elders? The text calls them prophets and teachers, not elders.

Barclay says this very list symbolizes the universal appeal of the Gospel. He adds, “Barnabas was a Jew from Cyprus; Lucius came from Cyrene in North Africa; Simeon was also a Jew but his other name Niger is given and, since this is a Roman name, it shows that he must have moved in Roman circles; Manaen was a man with aristocratic connections; and Paul himself was a Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia and a trained rabbi. In that little band, the unifying influence of Christianity is exemplified. Men from many lands and many backgrounds had discovered the secret of ‘togetherness’ because they had discovered the secret of Christ.” According to church growth experts, the homogeneous church grows numerically, and the heterogeneous church does not. Heterogeneous, however, maybe the best place to grow spiritually because you are thrown together with people who are different than you and you have to learn to love them.

Barnabas is listed first. Since his arrival at Antioch, he was the leader there. Alexander says perhaps Barnabas was the presiding elder of the church.

Simeon was called Niger (black). His surname suggests an African origin (Rackham). His nickname was Black (Wiersbe). He was presumably of a dark complexion (Bruce). He has been identified as Simon, the Cyrenian, who bore the cross for Christ (Mt. 27:32; Mk. 15:21; Lk. 23:26). Marshall points out that if that is the case, it is surprising that Luke spells the two names differently from each other. Barclay says that identification, however, is correct. “It would be a thing most wonderful if the man whose first contact with Jesus was the carrying of the Cross—a task which he must have bitterly resented—was one of those directly responsible for sending out the story of the Cross to all the world. Simeon was one of the original evangelists of Acts 11:20” (Rackham; Bruce). He may be the same one Paul greets in his letter to the Romans (Rom. 16:21), although there is no evidence for that (Bruce). The ancient conjecture that he was the author of the book of Acts is “improbable” (Alexander; Bruce; Marshall).

Manaen had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, that is, Herod Antipas (Mt. 14:1 ff.). Josephus and the Talmud mention a man named Menahem, who predicted the elevation and long reign of Herod the Great. It is possible that his son, Manaen, was nursed or educated with the king’s sons (Alexander). If that connection is correct, Manaen was the son of a prophet (Rackham). At any rate, he was the “foster brother” of Herod Antipas (Rackham). Later, Herod Antipas had John the Baptist beheaded and Manaen was converted.

Saul is listed last. Alexander says Paul’s apostolic commission was not yet known. Therefore, he was “undistinguished from his fellow labors” (Alexander). If Barnabas being listed first means he was the leader, is the significance of Saul being listed last that he was the lowest-ranking teacher?

“As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them’” (13:2). These five men not only ministered to the church, they ministered to the Lord. Perhaps their ministry to the church was to the Lord. The Greek word translated “ministered” means “to supply public offices at his own expense, render public service, to serve.” It is the discharge of an official function (Alexander). The English “liturgy” comes from this Greek word (Rackham).

As they fasted, the Holy Spirit communicated to them by special revelation to one of them (Rackham; Bruce). This is a strong testimony to the personality and divine nature of the Holy Spirit (Rackham). His message was that Barnabas and Saul were to separate from the church at Antioch for a special work He had called them to do. The book of Acts is about the continuing work of Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit through several of the apostles (1:1-3; 13:2, 13:4, 13:9). Hodges says the references to the Holy Spirit in this chapter are part of Luke’s scheme to develop the parallel between Peter and Paul as apostles.

A Human Decision “Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent *them* away” (13:3). Once the will of God was revealed to them, they fasted for God’s blessing on this new venture (Alexander). After that, they laid hands on Barnabas and Saul, not to ordain them to the ministry, but to set them apart to a specific task, which would be completed (14:26). Then, they sent them on their divinely ordained journey. The Greek word translated “sent” means “to set free, release, let go, dismiss.”

The pronoun “they” in this section refers to the prophets and teachers, but based on Acts 15:40, Rackham claims “the whole church” took part “in the service and dismissal, as in the ordination of the Seven at Jerusalem.” Bruce concurs, saying, “The church of Antioch, through its leaders, expressed its fellowship with them and recognized them as its delegates or ‘apostles.’” He cites the fact that they are called “apostles” in Acts 14:4. Bruce goes on to say, “The whole church sent them out, and it was to the whole church that they made the report when, in due course, they returned to Antioch (14:26-27).” Marshall says something similar, “Since the list of names in verse 1 is primarily meant to show who was available from missionary service, and since changes of subjects are not uncommon in Greek, it is preferable to assume that Luke is thinking of an activity involving the members of the church generally; this will fit in with the fact that elsewhere similar decisions are mainly by the church as a whole” (1:15; 6:2, 5; 14:27; 15:22).

Before this occasion, the gospel has been spread by individuals and/or as a result of persecution. This is the first time a planned “overseas mission” has been carried out by the representatives of the particular church (Marshall). This church made a decision that changed Christianity forever. This church made a decision that changed Europe forever. This church made a decision that changed history forever. Without this decision, humanly speaking, Christianity would not have spread to Europe! History-changing moments start with a simple decision.

The Decision on Cyprus

Seleucia “So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus” (13:4). The previous verse says that the church sent them; this verse says the *Holy Spirit* sent them. Actually, two different Greek words are used. The one used here means “to send forth.” They were “let go” by the church; the Holy Spirit sent them.

Barnabas, Saul, and John Mark (13:5) departed for Cyprus. Barnabas and probably John Mark (Col. 4:10) were from Cyprus. They began at home. Cyprus was renowned for wealth, fertility, and luxury (Alexander). When they left Antioch, they traveled to Seleucia, a Syrian port west of Antioch. Antioch was 16 miles from the sea (Marshall). From there, they sailed to Cyprus, a large island off the coast of Palestine that was also a Roman province. It was a journey of about 60 miles to Cyprus, a large island about 140 miles long and 60 miles wide (Marshall).

Salamis “And when they arrived in Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. They also had John as *their* assistant” (13:5). They began their mission on the island of Cyprus in the city of Salamis, which was in the southeast corner of the island. Salamis had a large Jewish community, large enough to have more than one synagogue. Their strategy was to begin by preaching the gospel in Jewish synagogues (13:14, 13:46; 14:1; 16:13; 17:1, 17:10; 18:4, 18:19; 19:8; 28:17). Bruce quotes Ramsay, Paul “was always sure of a good opening for his Gentile mission among the ‘God-fearing,’ who formed part of this audience in every synagogue.”

John Mark was with them as an assistant. Rackham suggests one of his duties might have been to baptize converts. Bruce points out that some scholars think this implies they took John Mark because he was an eyewitness to essential events in the Gospel narrative. Wiersbe says John Mark helped in numerous ways, relieving Barnabas and Paul of details that would have interfered with their ministry of the Word.

Hughes says, “Nothing notable happened” in Salamis.

Paphos “Now when they had gone through the island to Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew whose name was Bar-Jesus” (13:6). After Salamis, they preached their way across the island (8:25, 40; 9:32) until they came to the city of Paphos, a city on the western coast. It was a ninety-mile trip (Wiersbe). Paphos was famous for worshipping Venus. It was also the seat of the Roman government, that is, the resident of the Proconsul (Alexander). In other words, it was the capital (Rackham). At Paphos, they encountered Bar-Jesus, a Jewish false prophet and sorcerer. Jewish false prophets and sorcerers were unusual because Jews shunned such activity (Wiersbe). He was an “impostor” and a renegade (Alexander).

“Who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. This man called for Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God” (13:7). Bar-Jesus, a name which means “son of Joshua,” served in the court of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. Critics once attacked the Bible because Luke called Sergius Paulus a proconsul. Later archaeological discoveries proved Luke was correct. General Cesnola discovered an inscription dated in the proconsulship of Paulus (Rackham; see also Bruce and Marshall).

Sergius Paulus is described as an intelligent man. The Greek word translated “intelligent” means “intelligent, sagacious, understanding.” Alexander says it means “thoughtful” or “reflecting” with a particular allusion to religious subjects. When Sergius Paulus heard about what Barnabas and Saul were preaching, he called for them to come to speak to him about “the word of God,” that is, the gospel (Alexander).

“But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith” (13:8). Bar-Jesus (13:6), also known as Elymas (his Greek name) withstood Barnabas and Saul. The Greek word translated “withstood” means “to set against, to withstand, resist, oppose.” It appears in Acts 6:10. Alexander says that the kind of opposition it suggests here is open argumentation and disputation, but it does not exclude indirect and private methods. Rackham suggests that Bar-Jesus gave a different version of Jesus’ life. By withstanding Barnabas and Saul, Bar-Jesus sought to turn the proconsul away from the faith. The Greek word rendered “turn away” means “distort, twist, perverts.” Alexander says that it implies violence or great exertion. Wiersbe says this event illustrates what Jesus taught in the Parable of the Tares (Mt. 13:24-30, 36-43). When the Lord sows wheat, Satan sows tares and counterfeits.

“Then Saul, who also is called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, ‘O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord?’” (13:9-10). This is the first time Saul is called Paul. Hereafter, he will be called Paul. Saul was his Jewish name. Paul, his Roman name, corresponds to his entry into a manly Gentile ministry (Marshall). Hodges says it signifies the transition from the Jewish to the Gentile witness.

Alexander points out that at this point, “There is here a sudden change in Saul’s relative position, not only with respect to Barnabas, but also to the whole conduct of the mission, and the whole course of the history. From holding an inferior place, as indicated even by the order of the names (see 11:30; 12:25; 13:1, 2), he now comes forward in this singular emergency, addresses Elymas in tones of high authority, and acts as the organ of divine justice, in predicting or

inflicting a retributive calamity. This change in his position is accompanied, as in the case of Abraham, Jacob, and Peter (Gen. 17, 5. 32, 28; John 1:42), by a “change of name.” Rackham says, “Saul’s sudden vigor brings him to the front.”

This is not the first time Paul was filled with the Holy Spirit (9:17). This was “specially inspired to utter this denunciation” (Alexander). Paul looked at Bar-Jesus intently to arrest the attention of him and the spectators and to awe them under the impression of God’s authority (Alexander).

Paul was filled with the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth; Bar-Jesus was filled with deceit and fraud. He was not just tainted with these qualities; he was full of them (Alexander). As a son of God, Paul was filled with the Holy Spirit. As a son of the devil, Bar-Jesus was filled with an unholy spirit. As a friend of a righteous God, Paul was proclaiming the straight way of the Lord. As an enemy of all that is right and good (Alexander), Bar-Jesus was perverting the straight ways of the Lord, which is probably a reference to the Lord’s ways of salvation (Alexander). In short, Paul calls Bar-Jesus, the son of the devil and enemy of all that is right and good, accusing him of perverting the straight way of the Lord by deceit and fraud. He was no son of a savior (Jesus); he was the son of the devil (Rackham).

“And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord *is* upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time. And immediately a dark mist fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand” (13:11). Paul pronounced judgment upon Bar-Jesus, saying the hand of the Lord, a metaphor for the power of the Lord, is upon him to make him blind “for a time,” that is, temporarily (Bruce; Marshall). Not seeing the sun may strongly express total blindness (Alexander). Chrysostom said this was not a word of punishment but of conversion. Bede remarked that Paul knew by experience that the darkness of the eyes might be followed by the illumination of the mind.

“Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had been done, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord” (13:12). When he saw the power of God in action, Sergius Paulus was astonished at the teaching of the Lord, that is, His mode of teaching (Alexander), and he believed. Luke did not record what happened to Bar-Jesus or Sergius Paulus. Tradition says that Sergius Paulus accompanied Paul to Spain and afterward was Bishop of Narbonne in France (Alexander).

This experience was a life-changing moment for Paul. The next verse speaks of Paul and his party (13:13). Before this, Barnabas was the leader (9:27; 11:22, 11:25; 13:1; see “Barnabas and Saul” in 11:30; 12:25; 13:2, 13:7). The experience with Bar-Jesus changed all of that. Saul is now known as Paul (13:9). Luke does not write just “Paul and Barnabas;” he speaks of “Paul and his party.” It is now Paul’s party. He is the leader of the group. Alexander says the expression “Paul and his party” was chosen to “render prominent the change in Paul’s position and to show that he is now the leader.” Saul’s decision to rebuke Bar-Jesus changed his life.

All of us make routine decisions every day. It would be difficult to list all the decisions you made yesterday, not to mention those you have made throughout your life. Dr. Phil says, “There are a surprisingly small number of choices that actually rise to the level of life-changing ones” (McGraw, *Self Matters*, p. 127). I told my wife about this message and asked her to give me an illustration of a good decision. Without thinking, she said, “You decided to marry me!”

Spiritually, the most life-changing choices are deciding to trust Christ to get you to heaven and deciding to trust the grace of God to get you through life (11:23).

The Decision at Perga

Perga “Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem” (13:13). The missionary team left Paphos and sailed to Perga in Pamphylia. They did not enter Asia Minor through Cilicia, Paul’s native province, where he had already labored (9:30; 11:25). They entered through Pamphylia, the adjacent province to the west (Alexander). They probably landed at Attalia (14:25) and, from there, traveled 12 miles inland to Perga (Marshall), the capital of Pamphylia (Rackham).

Paul It has been suggested that perhaps the change of leadership was deferred until they left Cyprus and entered Asia Minor. Thus, Barnabas took the lead as long as they were in his native country (Alexander).

Barnabas Barclay says, “Without his name even being mentioned, this verse pays the greatest of all tributes to Barnabas. So far, the order has always been Barnabas and Saul (Acts 13:2). It was Barnabas who had set out as the leader of this expedition. But now it is Paul and Barnabas. Paul assumed the leadership of the expedition, and the lovely thing about Barnabas was that there was no word of complaint from him. He was prepared to take second place so long as God’s work was done.”

John Mark At this point, John Mark departed from them to return to Jerusalem, his hometown. The Greek word translated “departing” means “to turn back, return.” Alexander points out that the Greek word translated “departing” denotes not mere separation but desertion, being used elsewhere in an unfavorable sense (Mt. 7:23; Lk. 9:39). An even stronger term is used in Acts 15:39.

John Mark’s reason for abandoning the team has been conjectured to be “weariness, homesickness, feeble health, important business at Jerusalem, etc.” (Alexander). Long ago, Chrysostom said the lad wanted his mother. It has been suggested that John Mark was discontent with the unexpected transfer of authority from Barnabas, his kinsman (Col. 4:10), to one who before this, occupied a lower place (Alexandra), that it was not a personal matter, but one of principle; John Mark was unable to keep pace with the rapid expansion of Paul’s view of the work in the Gentile world (Rackham). Barclay says, “The proposed journey up into the plateau where Antioch in Pisidia stood” was “one of the hardest and most dangerous roads in the world.” Later, he adds that the road was notorious for robbers and brigands. What caused John Mark to depart? Was it homesickness, doubts, fear, or resentment? Barclay concludes we will never know why John Mark left.

This decision changed John Mark’s life. He missed the rest of this trip and all of the next trip.

Summary: Decisions change the course of our lives for better or worse. Paul made a decision that changed his life for the greater good of himself and others. John Mark made a decision and changed him for the worse.

You can make decisions that can change your life for the better. You can make decisions that can change your life for the worse.

In his book *Self Matters*, Dr. Phil tells the story of his high school friend, Dean. He writes, “During our entire high school careers in Kansas City, Dean and I were inseparable. We took classes, played sports, ate, and spent weekends chasing girls together. We both found work as laborers—”grunts” would be a more accurate label—at a warehouse downtown. The hours were terrible and the work was worse, but the money, such as it was, allowed us to indulge our passion

for tinkering with cars, going on dates, and having a pocket full of cash. It was pretty intoxicating to a couple of kids from, shall we say, the less-than-fancy side of town.”

“As senior year arrived and many of us started thinking long thoughts about college and beyond, Dean had fallen in love big time with a girl at our high school. Before long, he was talking to our shift supervisor at the warehouse about a job that had opened up elsewhere in the plant. Compared to the work he and I had been doing, this new position was a ‘grown-up’ job. It meant significant responsibility. More importantly, it came with a “real people” salary: maybe nine or ten thousand dollars a year, which in those days was all the money in the world to a poor boy. Within a few days after our graduation, while the rest of us were planning for the next ‘preparatory’ phase of life, Dean had made a choice. He was through preparing; it was time to start living. Immediately after graduating, Dean seemed to have a nice apartment, a killer stereo, and a shiny new pickup truck. His wedding date was just around the corner. At the farewell party that he threw for all of us ‘kids’ later that summer, we all admired Dean’s pickup, revving the engine and smelling that new smell; we looked around his apartment, amazed that an eighteen-year-old actually owned furniture, and we pretty much just drooled with envy for Dean. Soon I packed my luggage (three pillowcases), and off I went to school, dead broke but bright-eyed.”

“I didn’t see or talk to Dean for several months. Our paths had parted into two dramatically different worlds. Soon, word trickled through the grapevine that Dean had lost his great job. Naturally, we wondered about Dean and his new bride, but the demands of college prevented us from wondering for very long. Not long after that, we heard that Dean’s marriage had also fallen apart. By the time I caught up with him again during a visit back to the old stomping ground, about ten years had passed and Dean was now the night manager at a convenience store. He was single, still living in an apartment, and driving the very same pickup. We laughed about old times, and I shared a little bit about my practice with him, and he kidded me about being ‘Dr. McGraw.’ ... After we had traded good-natured barbs and caught each other up on the details of our lives and families, Dean fell silent. Finally, he said, ‘My God, Phil, what happened? You and I were almost twins in school, a pair of bookends. We made the same grades; we blew off the same classes; we ran from the cops together; we walked the same halls and had the same friends—(hell). We were like peas in a pod. Now ten years later, I’m working the night shift at the local ‘stop and rob,’ and you’re a (damn) doctor! What (the hell) happened?’

“As much as I would have preferred to just stare at my shoes at that point, I remember answering, ‘Well, what happened was that you made your choice, and I made mine. You did what you did, and I did what I did. When you choose the behavior, you choose the consequences.’ Ten years before, he had chosen marriage and the ‘grown-up’ job, while the rest of us had chosen college; he had chosen the ‘grown-up’ salary, while the rest of us had chosen to live like paupers for the next four years; he had chosen a seemingly secure position, while the rest of us took the risk that our opportunities would multiply once we had diplomas. Now we had those diplomas and Dean had a stack of pay stubs from a number of dead-ends, no-future jobs. As much as he might now have wanted to go to college, he was too far in debt to even consider it. In other words, the choice he made at eighteen, the choice to have a little bit now rather than a whole lot later, was outcome determinative. Now, college is not for everybody and his decision could very well have worked out for him, but it didn’t. He could have wound up running the whole place, but he didn’t. As I said, when you choose the behavior, you choose the consequences. Dean would surely put his choice to take immediate gratification, in the form of right-now marriage and money, at the top of his list of seven critical choices” (McGraw, *Self Matters*, pp.127-129).

If you have made a bad spiritual decision, you can always start making good decisions that God will honor. A young man asked a successful old man how he had become so successful. The old man looked at him and said: “Good decisions.” The young man asked how one could come to make good decisions. The old man said: “Experience.” The young man asked how one could come to gain experience. The old man answered, “Bad decisions.”

Years later, when John Mark reappears on the pages of Scripture, he has obviously learned to make good decisions. Paul, writing to the Colossians from prison in Rome, tells them to receive John Mark if he comes to them and just before his death, he tells Timothy to bring John Mark because he is useful to him (2 Tim. 4:11). As Fosdick put it, ‘No man need stay the way he is.’ By the grace of God, the man who was once a deserter became the writer of a gospel and the man whom, in the end, Paul wanted beside him.” A. T. Roberson says, John Mark “flickered in the crisis,” but his light did not go completely out” (Roberson, cited by Wiersbe). John Mark learned to make good decisions and God used him.

FOR THE JOY OF IT ALL

Life consists of headaches, heartaches, and heartbreaks, sadness, weakness, and sickness. We would all like to escape as much of it as possible. Maybe the super saints had it figured out. Let's look at one of the super saints—Paul. As we do, we will discover that it gets worse and it gets better all at the same time. What does that mean? Paul and Barnabas began their first missionary journey by going to Cyprus. They establish churches in southern Galatia (Rackham) during the remainder of the trip.

The Invitation

The Visit “But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down” (13:14). Leaving Perga, they traveled 100 miles to Antioch in Pisidia (Rackham; Marshall). The first city in Galatia in which they preached was Antioch in Pisidia, the capital of Pisidia.

Why did they stop in Pisidia? Later, when Paul wrote to the Galatians, he said, “You know that because of physical infirmity, I preached the gospel to you at first” (Gal. 4:13). Ramsay suggested that Paul had an attack of malaria and the remedy was to move to higher ground (cited by Rackham). Pisidia was 3600 feet above sea level (Bruce). Rackham speculates that they were headed for Ephesians, the seat of the proconsul and the greatest city in Asia Minor. They stopped in Antioch in Pisidia because Paul got sick.

Barclay puts it like this, “The oldest tradition is that Paul suffered from prostrating headaches. The most likely explanation is that he was the victim of a virulent recurring malaria fever that haunted the low coastal strip of Asia Minor. A traveler says that the headache characteristic of this malaria was like a red-hot bar thrust through the forehead; and another likens it to a dentist's drill boring through a man's temple. It is most likely that this malaria attacked Paul in low-lying Pamphylia and that he had to make for the plateau country to shake it off. Note that it never struck him to turn back. Even when his body was aching, Paul never ceased to drive on and to be an adventurer for Christ.”

At any rate, Paul and Barnabas (“they”) stopped at Antioch in Pisidia, a Roman city with a Jewish colony (Rackham). In the synagogue, they took their seats as visitors.

The Invitation “And after the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, saying, ‘Men *and* brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say on’” (13:15). Within each synagogue, there was no designated minister, such as a pastor in a modern church. Rather, each synagogue had a “ruler,” sometimes more than one. The ruler arranged the service, which consisted of reading the Scriptures, praying, preaching, and presiding over the service. The ruler could select any male Israelite of good standing to read the Scripture, pray, or speak. Only a priest could pronounce a blessing (Rackham).

Rackham explains, “The service on the Sabbath day consisted of three parts: (1) The recitation of the Shema—a kind of creed composed out of Deut. vi 4-9, xi 13-21, Num. xv 37-41,—Prayer, Eulogies or Benedictions, to which the people responded *Amen*, and, if a priest was present, the Blessing. (2) Then followed the reading of the Scriptures: first of *the law*, i.e., the five Books of Moses, then of *the prophets*, which included the historical books. The Law was

divided into lessons forming a three-year course. In Palestine, seven persons took part in its reading, the attendant (*chazzan*) handed the roll, and a *methurgeman* interpreted the Hebrew into the current Aramaic. In the synagogues of the Dispersion, it is most likely that the Greek Bible (the Septuagint) was generally read instead of the Hebrew. (3) At the end came an exposition or *exhortation* by some competent person, which might be followed by discussion. The preacher sat and ‘taught’ the people, for that was the technical phrase.” Alexander says that reading the Law of Moses dates back to the earliest times. The reading of the Prophets was introduced as a result of the edict of Antiochus Epiphanies, which prohibited the reading of the Law.

Paul and Barnabas were not sitting in the chief seats of the synagogue (Mt. 23:6); they were probably sitting near the entrance (Alexander). Having lodged in the Jewish quarter, they were known as teachers (Rackham). The rulers of the synagogue sent an attendant to invite them to speak.

The Message

“Then Paul stood up, and motioning with *his* hand said, “Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen” (13:16). Paul, now the leader, stood, gestured, and began to speak. Jesus stood to read the Scripture and sat to teach. Standing to teach, however, seems to have been practiced in the synagogues of the dispersion (Bruce; Marshall). It has been suggested that men sat to expound the Scripture and stood to exhort. He made a gesture to invite attention (Bruce). What follows is a summary of the sermon (Rackham).

He addressed the men of Israel, that is, those who were Jews by birth and those who feared God, that is, Gentiles (Alexander), among whom were some of the leading ladies of the city (Rackham, who cites 13:50). The word “listen” implies that those who were listening might hear something to which they were not accustomed to or for which they were not prepared (Alexander).

Paul’s speech can be divided into three parts. Rackham calls the three parts the introduction (13:17-25), the gospel (13:26-37), and the practical appeal (13:38-41). Wiersbe’s divisions are preparation (13:16-25), declaration (13:26-37), and application (13:38-41). Wiersbe also points out that each part begins with “men and brethren.” Barclay divides the sermon into five parts.

The Introduction Paul begins with a survey of the Old Testament from Abraham to David (see Steven’s message in Acts 7). This could be called his introduction. Perhaps, he began, “where they were.” It has been suggested that on this occasion, 1 Samuel 13:14 (quoted in 13:22) and 1 Samuel 7:6-16 (see 13:23) were read (see Bruce; Marshall). If so, those passages were what they were thinking about, and Paul starts with an introduction to them.

1. The Patriarchs and the Exodus. “The God of this people Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He brought them out of it” (13:17). Paul begins by proclaiming that God choose the *fathers* during the period of the Patriarchs and he exalted and delivered the *people* during the period of the Exodus. The term “exalted” is a reference to their extraordinary privileges and the expression “high arm” is a reference to the extraordinary power of God (Alexander). By using the word “our,” Paul identifies with the Jews.

“Now for a time of about forty years, He put up with their ways in the wilderness” (13:18). After the Exodus, the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness for about 40 years (7:42). Actually, it was 38 years (“about”). Alexander remarks that after the Exodus, there was an error. For these many years, God put up with their willfulness and waywardness (Rackham).

2. The Conquest. “And when He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He distributed their land to them by allotment” (13:19). During the period of the Conquest, God (“He”) destroyed seven nations (Deut. 7:1; Josh. 3:10; Neh. 9:8), that is, seven tribes of the Canaanites (Alexander). After that, God distributed the land to them by lot.

3. Judges. “After that, He gave *them* judges for about four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet” (13:20). After the conquest, God gave Israel judges, the last of whom was Samuel, who was also a prophet (Alexander). This verse says that the period of the Judges lasted about 450 years. The years mentioned in the book of Judges do add up to 450 years (Gloag, vol. 2, p. 23). The problem is that 1 Kings 6:1 says that from the Exodus to the fourth year of Solomon was 480 years. In other words, according to 1 Kings 6:1, the period of the Judges was not 450 years.

The Critical Greek Text arranges the word, so the 450 years is before the Judges. Thus, the NIV renders this verse, “All this took about 450 years. After this, God gave them judges until the time of Samuel, the prophet.” According to this explanation, the four hundred and fifty years cover the time in Egypt (400 years; see Gen. 15:13; Acts 7:6), plus forty years in the wilderness and ten years during the period of the Judges (Bruce; Marshall).

The ancient versions agree with the Textus Receptus (Barnes) and so does Josephus, who says Solomon “began to build the Temple in the fourth year of his reign, 592 years after the exodus out of Egypt” (Josephus, *Antiquities*, 7. 3.1). Jamison, Faussett, and Brown explain, “Taking the sense to be as in our version, that it was the period of the judges itself which lasted about four hundred fifty years, this statement will also appear historically correct, if we include in it the interval of subjection to foreign powers which occurred during the period of the judges, and understand it to describe the whole period from the settlement of the tribes in Canaan to the establishment of royalty. Thus, from the Exodus to the building of the temple were five hundred ninety-two years [Josephus, *Antiquities*, 8.3.1]; deduct forty years in the wilderness; twenty-five years of Joshua’s rule [Josephus, *Antiquities*, 5.1.29]; forty years of Saul’s reign (Acts 13:2); forty of David’s and the first four years of Solomon’s reign (1 Kings 6:1), and there remain, just four hundred forty-three years; or, in round numbers, ‘about four hundred fifty years.’”

4. Kingdom. “And afterward they asked for a king; so God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years” (13:21). After the Judges, God gave them a king. There is no scriptural record of the length of Saul’s reign, but Josephus says it was for forty years (Josephus, *Ant.* 6:378; Alexander; Marshall).

“And when He had removed him, He raised up for them David as king, to whom also He gave testimony and said, ‘I have found David the *son* of Jesse, a man after My *own* heart, who will do all My will’” (13:22). After God removed Saul, He raised up David. The testimony of David recorded here is not found in one place in the Old Testament, but it is made of the words from 1 Samuel 13:14 and Psalm 89:20 (Alexander). Marshall says, “I have found in David” comes from Psalm 89:21, “a man after my heart” comes from 1 Samuel 13:14 and “he will do all my will” maybe from Isaiah 44:28 (where the phrase is used of Cyrus) or from Psalm 89. Saul did not have a heart to do God’s will; David did. Marshall adds that the point is to establish David as the ideal King in Israel.

“From this man’s seed, according to *the* promise, God raised up for Israel a Savior; Jesus” (13:23). As God promised (2 Sam. 7:12), He raised up a Savior from the lineage of David.

5. The Forerunner. “After John had first preached, before His coming, the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel” (13:24). Before the Savior’s public appearance (Alexander), John the Baptist preached the baptism of repentance.

“And as John was finishing his course, he said, ‘Who do you think I am? I am not *He*. But behold, there comes One after me, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to loose” (13:25). John also testified that he was not only not this Savior; he was not worthy to loose the sandals of the Savoir. To untie the sandals was the lowest kind of menial service (Alexander).

The Message The expression “men and brethren” (13:26) indicates a transition to another point, namely, that the message of salvation is sent to them.

1. Jerusalem. “Men *and* brethren, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to you the word of this salvation has been sent” (13:26). Paul addresses the audience as descendants of Abraham (Jews) and God-fearers (Gentiles), telling them that the message of salvation is sent to them. Alexander says that “the word of this salvation” is a similar expression to “the word of this life” (5:20).

“For those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they did not know Him, nor even the voices of the Prophets which are read every Sabbath, have fulfilled *them* in condemning *Him*” (13:27). In condemning Him, the people and rulers in Jerusalem fulfilled the Scriptures read in the synagogues every Sabbath. They did not know who He was because they did not understand those Scriptures. The most enlightened spiritual guides failed to recognize the Messiah, who was foretold in the Scriptures and, in doing so, fulfilled the very Scriptures that predicted His rejection (Alexander).

“And though they found no cause for death *in Him*, they asked Pilate that He should be put to death” (13:28). Moreover, they were so blinded as to their own Messiah and so bent on His destruction that even though they were unable to find a capital offense in Him, they asked Pilate to put Him to death (Alexander).

“Now when they had fulfilled all that was written concerning Him, they took *Him* down from the tree and laid *Him* in a tomb. But God raised Him from the dead” (13:29-30). Actually, what they did was fulfill Scripture. They put Him in a tomb and God raised Him from the dead. Nicodemus and Joseph were the rulers of the Jews who buried Him. The burial proves His death and resurrection (Rackham; Bruce).

“He was seen for many days by those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are His witnesses to the people” (13:31). The witnesses from Galilee, who saw Him over many days, are proof that He arose from the dead. This evidence for the resurrection was not for a moment, but for many days, not by strangers, but by those who knew Him well, not in private, but in public (Alexander). Paul does not mention his own experience of seeing the risen Christ as he does in 1 Corinthians 15:8. As Marshall observes, the appeal to them is not to throw away the opportunity of salvation by following the example of the people in Jerusalem who rejected Jesus and condemned Him to death.

2. Antioch. “And we declare to you glad tidings; that promise which was made to the fathers” (13:32). Having been rejected at Jerusalem, the message is now broadcast in Antioch (Rackham). Paul declares to them the good news, namely, the promises of the coming of the Messiah (Alexander) that was given to the fathers in the Scriptures. Wiersbe says it is the gospel that Jesus died, was buried, and rose again.

“God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus. As it is also written in the second Psalm: ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You’” (13:33). By raising Jesus from the dead, God has fulfilled the promise given to the fathers for us, their children. The second Psalm is one such promise. The second Psalm was recognized as applying to the Messiah (Marshall); the New Testament applies it to Jesus (4:25; Lk. 3:22; Heb. 1:5; 5:5). According to Alexander, Psalm 2 is a promise of the incarnation. On the other hand, Wiersbe sees the second

Psalm as a reference to the resurrection (see also 4:25). He says the word “today” refers to the date of the decrees itself but refers to the eternal sonship of the Son. This is a reference to the day God declared Jesus the Son/king (see notes on Ps. 2:7 and Heb. 1:5).

“And that He raised Him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, He has spoken thus: ‘I will give you the sure mercies of David’” (13:34). God also raised His son (13:33) from the dead. His Son did not see corruption. Then, Paul quotes Isaiah 55:3. By resurrecting Jesus, the son of David, from the dead, God fulfilled His promise to David that his son would sit on the throne of David.

“Therefore He also says in another *Psalm*: ‘You will not allow Your Holy One to see corruption.’ For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers, and saw corruption, but He whom God raised up saw no corruption” (13:35-37). To further demonstrate that God fulfilled His promise to the father that He would resurrect His son, Jesus, Paul quotes Psalm 16:10 (2:27). The Jews considered Psalm 16 to be a messianic Psalm (Wiersbe). The expression “The Holy One” in Psalm 16:10 cannot refer to David, who died after he did the will of God, was buried and saw corruption. On the other hand, the Son of David was raised from the dead and did not see corruption, that is, the body’s dissolution (Alexander).

Conclusion “Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which the law of Moses could not justify you” (13:38-39). Addressing them again as “brethren,” Paul draws two conclusions (“therefore” in 13:38 and 13:40). He also uses the same expression as Peter, namely, “let it be known to you” (2:14; 4:10).

1. Forgiveness. Paul proclaimed they needed to know that because of God’s Son, they could have the forgiveness of sins. Forgiveness was regularly proclaimed at the end of similar speeches in Acts (2:18; 3:19; 5:31; 10:43). The offer of forgiveness is through “this Man,” that is, through His death and “faith in his blood” (Rackham).

Paul also proclaimed they needed to know that because of God’s Son, they could be justified from all the things they could not be justified from the Law of Moses. The justification for all things from which the Law of Moses could not justify one is a reference to deliberate sin for which no atonement was available in the Mosaic Law (Bruce). Justification is one of Paul’s major messages in Galatians and in Romans. Rackham calls Galatians and Romans the textbooks on justification. Paul uses the term “justification” in the forensic sense of being acquitted and accounted innocent” (Rackham).

The offer of forgiveness and justification is by faith. Salvation is a gift to be received, not a reward to be achieved. There is no reference to baptism. No one can be declared to be in the right relationship with God based on attempting to keep the Mosaic Law (Marshall). “The tax collector who confessed himself to be a sinner and cast himself on the divine mercy went home justified, rather than a man who carefully regulated his life by the demands of Moses’ Law (Luke 18:14)” (Bruce). All who believe are justified from all things. “Believers in Christ are *completely* justified” (Bruce).

The offer of forgiveness and justification is universal and extended to “everyone.” Alexander points out that the idea of an invitation is implied as it is in a government proclamation of pardon.

2. Warning. “Beware, therefore, lest what has been spoken in the prophets come upon you. Behold, you despisers, marvel and perish! For I work a work in your days, a work which you will by no means believe, though one were to declare it to you” (13:40-41). Paul’s second

conclusion is a warning against the danger of rejecting the offer. He cites Habakkuk 1:5. Habakkuk warned the Jews of his day that God had prepared a “work” of judgment for them, namely, a Babylonian invasion. Likewise, Paul warns his hearers that God will judge those who do not believe.

Alexander says, “As if he had said, ‘Be upon your guard lest rejecting the salvation which I have now offered in the name of your Messiah, you should be called down judgments on yourself as fearful and incredible as those predicted by Habakkuk, and inflicted by the hands of the Chaldeans on our unbelieving fathers.’”

The Reaction

Of the Gentiles “So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath” (13:42). After Paul spoke, the Jews departed, but the Gentiles who remained in the synagogue begged Paul and Barnabas (13:43) to return the next Sabbath to preach to them again. They had heard expositions and exhortations but never heard anything like this. The request, of course, had to be given to the rulers of the synagogue because it was their responsibility to invite speakers to address the congregation God (Bruce).

Of the Many “Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God” (13:43). Many of the Jews and Gentile proselytes, that is, full converts to Judaism (Bruce), followed Paul and Barnabas to where they were staying (Rackham). These are the ones who believed the message (Marshall). So Paul and Barnabas persuade them to continue in the grace of God.

Of the Whole City “On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God” (13:44). Word of what was going to happen in the synagogue on the next Sabbath spread rapidly. On the next Sabbath, the whole city came together to hear the Word of God, that is, the gospel (Alexander). The synagogue was packed (Rackham). Alexander points out that nothing is said about miracles. Their desire to hear more appears to be the only cause for their coming together.

Of the Jews “But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul” (13:45). When the Jews saw the multitude gathered in the synagogue, they reacted. Perhaps they were annoyed at finding their synagogue practically taken over by a Gentile audience like Christians finding their customary seat occupied on Sunday morning by outsiders (Bruce). The leaders feared forfeiting their influence over the Gentiles (Alexander). They were losing their adherents, and their selfish exclusiveness and pride in privilege prevented them from accepting the Gentiles as their fellow heirs to the divine promises (Rackham). They had no use for salvation, which allowed Gentiles to be saved without first becoming Jews. As a result, they opposed Paul by contradicting him and blaspheming Paul and Barnabas as heretics and Christ as a false Messiah (Alexander). Perhaps they accused Paul and Barnabas of being sheep stealers (Bruce). Rackham suggests they blasphemed Christ by contending that everyone who hangs on a tree is cursed (Gal. 3:13).

Of Paul and Barnabas “Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, ‘It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles’” (13:46). As a result of the rejection of the Jews, Paul and Barnabas told them the gospel (“the word of God”) needed to be preached to them first, but since they rejected it, they were not worthy of eternal life. Paul and

Barnabas were going to preach to the Gentiles. As Alexander points out, this does not mean that they would abandon all attempts to convert the Jews (18:5; 19:8). Rather, the idea is that they would turn from the Jews to the Gentiles in Antioch and the implication is that they would do the same in the future (18:6; 19:9; 28:28). Barclay remarks, “As has been said, ‘The Jews saw the heathen as chaff to be burned; Jesus saw them as a harvest to be reaped for God.’ And his Church must have a like vision of a world for Christ.”

“For so the Lord has commanded us: ‘I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, that you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth’” (13:47). To give biblical justification to what they had decided to do, Paul and Barnabas quote Isaiah 49:6, where the Messiah is described as the source of light, not merely to the Jews, but also to the Gentiles, not merely to the promised land, but to the ends of the earth (Lk. 2:31-32). The task of God’s Servant is to be a light to the nations and a means of salvation throughout the world (Marshall).

Of the Gentiles Believers “Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region” (13:48-49). When the Gentiles heard that Paul and Barnabas would be preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, they, of course, were glad and glorified the word of the Lord (13:48). In fact, the gospel spread throughout the entire region (13:49). In the course of relating what happened, Luke says, “As many as had been appointed to eternal life believed” (13:48). The Greek word translated “appointed” means “assign, appoint, order” (A-S; it is used in 15:2; 18:2; 28:23; Mt. 28:16; Rom. 13:1; 1 Cor. 16:15). Liddell and Scott list “appoint, assign, order, ordain” as meanings. A. T. Robertson says “appointed” is better than “ordain” (KJV). In Acts 15:2, it is translated as “determined.”

Some see the doctrine of election in this verse. Alexander asserts that the violent attempts to eliminate the doctrine of election from this verse by rendering the verb “disposed” can never change the simple fact that wherever this verb occurs as elsewhere, it inevitably expresses the assertion of power or authority, divine or human, and being in the passive voice, cannot denote mere disposition, much less self-determination, any more than the form used in Acts 2:40, which some have cited as a parallel example. Constable says, “Verse 48 is a strong statement of predestination: those whom God had previously appointed to eternal life believed the gospel (Eph. 1:4, 11).” Bruce says there is no good reason for weakening the concept of predestination here.

Others reject the idea of election in verse 48. Wesley points out that “the original word is not once used in Scripture to express eternal predestination of any kind.” Arguing that the context must determine the meaning of a word, Alford says the meaning here is as many as were “disposed” to eternal life believed. He adds that to find “pre-ordination to life” in this text, one must “force both the word and the context to a meaning which they do not contain.” Knowling contends that Calvinism is not here since verse 46 has already shown that the Jews had acted of their own choice. He adds, “The Jews as a nation had been ordained to eternal life—they had rejected this election—God equally ordained the those who believed amongst the Gentiles to eternal life, and it was in accordance with His divine appointment that the apostles turned to them” (Knowling, *Expositor’s New Testament*). Rackham argues, “Luke is thinking, not so much of individuals, as of classes—Jews and Gentile.”

Marshall remarks that whatever the precise nuance of the words, there is no suggestion that they received eternal life independently of their conscious faith. In the final analysis, God elects some to be saved, yet all are responsible for believing (2 Thess. 2:13-14). “It takes both” (Wiersbe).

Of the Unbelieving Jews “But the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region” (13:50). The unbelieving Jews stirred up, no doubt by misrepresentation (Alexander), the devout, that is, the Gentiles (Alexander) women, who were upper-class (Marshall), “well-to-do” (Bruce), “ladies of the aristocracy” (Rackham), and the city officials to persecute Paul and Barnabas and drive them from the city. The God-fearing Gentile women who attended the synagogue influenced their husbands, the city officials, to put pressure on Paul and Barnabas (Bruce).

Barclay explains, “At this time, the Jewish religion had a special attraction for women. In nothing was the ancient world more lax than in sexual morality. Family life was rapidly breaking down. The worst sufferers were women. The Jewish religion preached a purity of ethics and cleanness of life. Round the synagogues gathered many women, often of high social position, who found what they longed for in this teaching. Many of these women became proselytes; still more were God-fearers. The Jews persuaded them to incite their husbands, who were often men in influential positions, to take steps against the Christian preachers. The inevitable result was persecution, Antioch became unsafe for Paul and Barnabas and they had to go.”

Of Paul and Barnabas “But they shook off the dust from their feet against them, and came to Iconium” (13:51). When Paul and Barnabas departed from Antioch in Pisidia, as a symbolic act, they shook the dust from their feet. This was the custom of the ancient Jews, who shook the dust from their feet when they re-enter Palestine from other countries (Alexander). For Jews to do this to their fellow Jews was tantamount to regard them as pagan Gentiles (Marshall). They traveled to Iconium, 90 miles east-southeast of Pisidian Antioch (Bruce).

Barclay says, “What is meant for good news is in fact bad news for another kind of people. It simply makes worse the condemnation of those who have seen it and have disobeyed its summons to belief in Jesus Christ. There is excuse for the man who has never had a chance, but there is none for the man who has seen the splendor of the offer of God and has rejected it.”

Of the Disciples “And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit” (13:52). The believers became disciples by being baptized (Mt. 28:19-20) and continuing in the word (Jn. 8:31). The new disciples who remained in Antioch in Pisidia were filled with the Holy Spirit and joy (Rom. 14:17; 15:13; Gal. 5:22; 1 Thess. 1:6). Alexander observes that the disciples in Acts are repeatedly described as rejoicing in the very circumstances that should have produced the opposite effect (4:32-35; 9:31; 12: 24). In spite of the persecution and departure of the apostles, the disciples were filled with joy. Rather than being discouraged, they were filled with joy from the indwelling Holy Spirit (Bruce).

Summary: When Jesus was preached as the Messiah, the result was opposition and joy.

The result was opposition. Following the Lord can and often does make life more difficult. Paul, the “super saint,” suffered physically, socially, and, no doubt, psychologically. Actually, that should come as no surprise. Jesus is both the bearer *and* the bestower of the cross. Martian Luther argues, “We suffer because we hold to the Word of God, preach it, hear it, learn it, and practice it” (Clark, pp. 339-340).

The world’s opposition to Jesus Christ results in various levels of persecution. Wolves, bears, and lions do not persecute believers; people do. When Christ is preached, there will be a Herod, a Caiaphas, an Annas, and a Judas. “Luther considered the most insidious objective of the hostility leveled against Christians by both the world and the devil: the attempt to discredit Jesus Christ

and thereby make Christian faith and discipleship something shameful and ridiculous” (Clark, p. 342)

Attacks from without cause tumult within (Cook, p. 342). Therefore, believers must remember that His resurrection on Easter Sunday overturned the “ignominy of Jesus Christ on Good Friday” (Cook, p. 345).

There is also joy: joy in salvation (1 Pet. 1:8), joy in the spiritual life (Gal. 5:22), and joy (2 Jn. 4). In 1956, the popular song “Hot Diggity (Dog Ziggity Boom) was published and sung by Perry Como. The song says, “Hot diggity, dog ziggity, boom. What you do to me when you hold me tight.” “Hot diggity dog” was an expression of great delight that was popular in the 1950s and 1960s.

Tom Wallace tells of a fellow in Elkton, Maryland, who had never attended church. The first time he came to church, he got saved and was baptized. He came up from the water, clapping his hands and shouting, “Hot Dog, hot dog, hot dog.” Our relationship with the Lord should make us sing, “Hot diggity, hot ziggity dog!”

DESPITE IT ALL

Spurgeon says, “Good men must never expect to escape trouble; if they do, they will be disappointed.” Spurgeon is correct. If you expect to have a trouble-free life, you will be disappointed. There are times when life gets difficult. When it gets difficult, it gets discouraging. When it gets discouraging, the desire is to depart. Hence, marriages end in divorce and difficulties at work or at church result in departure.

When Barnabas and Paul started on the first missionary journey, they experienced opposition (13:45) and were even persecuted to the point that they were expelled from the region (13:50). It got so bad John Mark left and went home. For the joy of it all, Paul and Barnabas continued. They left town. They did not have to deal with the difficulty anymore, at least at Antioch. They could go on their merry way and enjoy the ministry. Well, guess what? It got worse—a lot worse. It not only got discouraging; it got painful, which is a joy-killer. What do you do when the pain kills the joy?

Iconium

The Success “Now it happened in Iconium that they went together to the synagogue of the Jews, and so spoke that a great multitude both of the Jews and of the Greeks believed” (14:1). Paul and Barnabas traveled from Antioch in Pisidia (13:14) to Iconium (13:51), a distance of about 90 miles (Marshall). As a result of preaching the synagogue at Iconium, a large number of both Jews and Gentiles believed.

The Opposition “But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren” (14:2). Apparently, there is a lapse of time between verse 1 and verse 2 (Marshall). The Jews who did not accept the message of Jesus being the Messiah “poisoned the minds” of the Gentiles against the new converts, whether Jews or Gentiles (Alexander). The Greek word translated “unbelieving” means “disobedient.” They disobeyed the command to believe. The Greek term rendered “poisoned” means “afflict, embitter.” The disobedient Jews “did their best to prejudice the minds” of unbelieving Gentiles against the new believers (Bruce).

“Therefore, they stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands” (14:3). The opposition did not hinder Paul and Barnabas from speaking boldly “in” the Lord. The Greek preposition translated “in” (ἐπι) means “upon” (see “with reliance upon the Lord” in NASB). The word “Lord” is a reference to “God as manifested in the Lord Jesus Christ” (Alexander). The expression “word of his grace” refers to the gospel (20:32; Marshall). Some Christians are like an arctic river—they are frozen at the month. Reliance upon the Lord to preach the good news of salvation thaws the month! Paul and Barnabas witnessed the grace of God, and God granted signs and wonders how to confirm their message (Gal. 3:5), as was done by the apostles in Jerusalem (5:12; Marshall). This is reminiscent of Hebrews 2:1-4 (Marshall).

The Departure “But the multitude of the city was divided: part sided with the Jews, and part with the apostles” (14:4). The message split the city, some siding with the unbelieving Jews and some with the apostles. Luke clearly calls both Paul and Barnabas apostles (Bruce). In the book of Acts, the word “apostle” always appears in the plural. This could refer the “body of apostles,”

represented by Paul and Barnabas (Alexander). Another possibility is that Paul and Barnabas were apostles of the church (see “messenger of the churches” in 2 Cor. 8:23, where the word translated “messenger” is the Greek word for “apostle” and “your messenger” in Phil. 2:25, where again “messenger” is the Greek word “apostle”).

“And when a violent attempt was made by both the Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to abuse and stone them, they became aware of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding region” (14:5-6). The opposition escalated to the point of attempted violence. The unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles (14:2) and their rulers plotted and planned to abuse and stone Paul and Barnabas. The Greek word rendered “abuse” means “to run riot, insult.” It describes insult, outrage, and wanton abuse; the idea of physical violence is not necessarily included (Alexander).

Rackham tells the story of Thecla contained in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*. As the story goes, Thecla was from one of the chief families in Iconium. When she heard Paul preach, she was personally devoted to him and determined to remain a virgin. She refused to be married to an aristocrat to whom she was supposed to be married. Both she and Paul were brought before the magistrates. Paul was scourged and expelled from the city. Thecla was condemned to be burned in the theater, but she was saved and followed Paul to Antioch. Eventually, she retired to Seleucia, where she lived as a virgin, preached the Word, and died in the good old age. Rackham suggested the story of Thecla explains what happened at Iconium. Paul was brought before the magistrates on some charge of interference with family life.

They decided to depart when Paul and Barnabas received word of the impending violence. They fled to Lystra, Derbe, and other cities around Lystra and Derbe (Alexander). They did not flee “in terror, or undue care for their own safety, but in the exercise of that discretion, which sometimes prompted them to stand and sometimes to retreat before danger” (Alexander, who cites 4:13, 4:20; 5:29; 5:42; 8:1; 9:20, 9:25, 9:29, 9:30; 12:17; 13:51). They were born again, but they were not born yesterday (Hughes).

“And they were preaching the gospel there” (14:7). Paul and Barnabas preached the gospel in Lystra (14:6), which was thirty miles from Iconium and Debra (Alexander; Marshall; Wiersbe says that Lystra was 18 miles from Iconium). Barclay says, “Paul and Barnabas were more and more taking their lives in their hands. What was proposed in Iconium was nothing other than a lynching. The further Paul and Barnabas went, they moved from civilization. In the more civilized cities, their lives were at least safe because Rome kept order, but out in the wilds, Paul and Barnabas were ever under the threat of mob violence from the excitable Phrygian crowds stirred up by the Jews. These two were brave men; and it always takes courage to be a Christian.”

Paul’s ministry always aroused both faith and opposition. His ministry divides men (Hodges). Nevertheless, in the face of opposition, Paul was bold (14:3) and under the threat of violence, Paul preached (14:5-7).

Lystra

The Healing “And in Lystra a certain man without strength in his feet was sitting, a cripple from his mother’s womb, who had never walked” (14:8). Alexander says this kind of congenial infirmity was regarded as incurable. The man’s condition was hopeless (Alexander). He was probably a beggar (Rackham).

“This man heard Paul speaking. Paul, observing him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed, said with a loud voice, ‘Stand up straight on your feet!’ And he leaped and walked” (14:9-10). Somehow the situation was such that the cripple man could hear Paul speak and Paul could see the cripple man. The Greek text says Paul saw that the man had the faith to be saved. Rackham contends that the apostle was speaking of being saved through faith in Jesus. The word “saved” can be used of healing. When Paul discerned that the cripple had the faith to be healed, raising his voice, he commanded the cripple to stand up straight. The word “straight” implies the cripple had been bent or otherwise deformed (Alexander). Peter performed a similar miracle at Jerusalem (3:1-10). Paul demonstrates the same power as Peter (Marshall).

The Reaction “Now when the people saw what Paul had done, they raised their voices, saying in the Lycaonian language, ‘The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!’” (14:11). When the people saw the miracle performed by Paul, raising their voice, they shouted that the gods had visited them in the likeness of humans. In their excitement, they dropped the foreign Greek and spoke in their own language (Rackham), probably a dialect of Greek (Alexander).

Why did Luke say they spoke in their own language? Was it simply a case of people reverting to their mother tongue when they got excited? Most say Luke recorded this to explain the apostle’s delay in refusing the honors of being gods (Alexander). In other words, Paul and Barnabas did not understand what was happening until they saw the priest coming with sacrifices (14:13; Bruce; Marshall).

“And Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker” (14:12). They called Barnabas Zeus, the Greek name. The Romans called this god Jupiter. They called Paul Hermes, the Greek name. The Roman name was Mercury. According to Greek mythology, Zeus was the supreme deity (Rackham), the chief of the gods (Wiersbe), and the father of the gods and men (Bruce). He was also the guardian of Lystra. Hermes was the spokesman for the gods (Alexander), and the messenger of the gods (Rackham). Later, when Paul wrote to the Galatians, he said, “My trial which was in my flesh you did not despise or reject, but you received me as an angel of God, *even* as Christ Jesus” (Gal. 4:14), but he is probably not speaking there of what the people of the city did here. In Galatians, he is simply saying that the believers received him as an angel from God.

“Then the priest of Zeus, whose temple was in front of their city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, intending to sacrifice with the multitudes” (14:13). When the priest in the temple of Zeus heard the rumor, they brought oxen and wreaths of flowers to sacrifice to the god whom they thought was visiting them. Wreaths of flowers were used in ancient sacrifices (Alexander). Barclay says, “The people around Lystra told a story that once Zeus and Hermes had come to this earth in disguise. None in all the land would give them hospitality until, at last, two old peasants, Philemon and his wife Baucis, took them in. As a result, the whole population was wiped out by the gods except Philemon and Baucis, who were made the guardians of a splendid temple and were turned into two great trees when they died. So when Paul healed the crippled man, the people of Lystra were determined not to make the same mistake again.”

The Message “But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard this, they tore their clothes and ran in among the multitude, crying out and saying, ‘Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them’” (14:14-15). When Barnabas and Paul understood what was happening, they tore their clothes. They were saying, “We are just like you. We have five fingers and five toes on each

limb” (Hughes). “We put our pants on one leg at a time.” Both Barnabas and Paul are called apostles (see 14:4), but Barnabas is again mentioned first because the crowd thought that since Paul was the spokesman, he was Hermes and, therefore, Barnabas was Zeus, who would be the one for whom the sacrifice was intended.

Barnabas and Paul addressed the crowd with “men,” which is “nearly equivalent to our “gentlemen” (Alexander) or “sirs” (Rackham). They assured the people that they were mere mortals like them. Barnabas and Paul preached that they should turn from useless things to the living God, the Creator. Rackham says Paul began with a doctrine they could readily accept, namely, creation by God. The Greek word translated “useless” means “vain, useless.” The true God is living as distinguished from lifeless or imaginary deities and He is living in that He is life-giving, the source of all living (Alexander). He is the living, giving, forgiving God (Wiersbe).

“who in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways” (14:16). Barnabas and Paul go on to explain that in past generations, God allowed “not approved, much less required” (Alexander) Gentiles to live in their own way, as opposed to God’s way (Alexander).

“Nevertheless, He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness” (14:17). At the same time, God had a witness, namely, that He did good things for them, such as giving rain and fruitful seasons, which filled them with food and joy (Rom. 1:19-20). The fact that God ordered the seasons to provide food ought to have made people mindful of Him and His claims on their worship (Bruce). “The world of nature should thus have led men to recognize the existence, power, and goodness of the Creator” (Marshall).

Barclay recounts, “As they sailed in the Mediterranean, Napoleon’s soldiers were discussing God. In the talk, they eliminated him altogether. Napoleon had been silent, but now he lifted his hand and pointed to the sea and the sky, ‘Gentlemen,’ he said, ‘who made all this?’”

“And with these sayings they could scarcely restrain the multitudes from sacrificing to them” (14:18). The apostles managed to stop the sacrifices, but only with difficulty (Alexander).

The Persecution “Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead” (14:19). Meanwhile, the Jewish leaders from Antioch and Iconium came to town. Antioch of Pisidia was more than a hundred miles from Lystra (Bruce). The Jewish leaders from out of town persuaded the multitudes to allow the Jews to stone Paul (2 Cor. 11:25; Gal. 6:17)! Paul was worshipped one minute and stoned the next. The Jewish leaders, no doubt, used “misrepresentation” (Alexander; see 13:45; 14:2). At any rate, Paul was stoned, dragged out of the city, and left for dead.

“However, when the disciples gathered around him, he rose up and went into the city. And the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe” (14:20). When the disciples gathered around Paul, they discovered that he was not actually dead (see “supposing” in 14:19). Paul managed to get up and return to the city. The next day Paul and Barnabas traveled to Derbe, which was 30 miles away (Rackham; Bruce says it was 60 miles away).

Paul used one approach with the synagogue congregations and another with the Gentiles. With the Jews and the proselytes, Paul used the Old Testament Scriptures. With the Gentiles, he “emphasized the God of creation and His goodness to the nations. His starting point was different, but his finishing point was the same: faith in the Lord Jesus Christ” (Wiersbe).

The Return Trip

Exhortation “And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch” (14:21). The Greek text indicates Paul and Barnabas did two things. They evangelized and they taught the converts (Alexander). After that, they retraced their steps to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch in Pisidia. Ramsay suggests that it was possible for them to return because all these cities had new magistrates (see Bruce).

“strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting *them* to continue in the faith, and *saying*, ‘We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God’” (14:22). When Paul and Barnabas returned to the various cities they had visited before, they did two things. They strengthened the believers (14:21) and they appointed elders (14:23).

Paul and Barnabas strengthened the disciples by exhorting them to continue in the faith. The Greek word translated “strengthened” (επιστηριζω) means “to make strong, confirm.” It only appears in Acts (14:22; 15:32, 41; 18:23, but στηριζω appears outside of Acts). The churches in Galatia certainly needed strengthening (Gal. 1:6). Marshall suggests that this means they were to continue in their belief and not fall back into Judaism or paganism. The exhortation included the reminder that through many tribulations, believers enter into the kingdom of God, indicating that the kingdom of God is still future (Marshall). Alexander says this is the necessary (“must”) resulting from the will of God and the nature of the evil in the world. Rackham thinks that the tribulation referred to is persecution. Barclay reminds us, “Jesus had come “not to make life easy but to make men great.” Perhaps, “holy” would be a better word. As an iron rod is held over the fire to straighten it, so God holds us over the fire of reflection to straighten us. “Crushed grapes give out the sweetest wine.”

Elders “So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed” (14:23). As Wiersbe points out, when Jesus gave the Great Commission, what He had in mind was establishing local churches. That is what Paul and Barnabas did. They preached the gospel and made many disciples (14:21).

Then Paul and Barnabas appointed elders. Pointing out that the Greek word translated “appointed” originally signified the vote of an assembly, Alexander concludes that the method of selection was the same as in Acts 6:5-6, where the people chose seven and the twelve ordained them (see also Rackham). It should be noted that nothing is said about the involvement of the church. The text clearly says Paul and Barnabas appointed the elders. Paul and Barnabas appointed elders (plural) in every church (singular). The elders were men from within the church, not outside. With prayer and fasting, Paul and Barnabas commended the new elders to the Lord.

Evangelism “And after they had passed through Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia. Now when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia” (14:24-25). Leaving Antioch, the capital of Pisidia, Paul and Barnabas passed through the remainder of the province of Pisidia. They entered the province of Pamphylia, where they preached the word in Perga and journeyed to Attalia. They had visited Perga before (13:13), but apparently, this is the first time they preached there.

The Report “From there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had completed” (14:26). From the seaport of Attalia, Paul and Barnabas sailed to Antioch of Syria, where they had first been commissioned by the Holy Spirit and had been commended to the grace of God by the church (13:1-5).

How long did the First Missionary Journey take? Estimates range from 18 months (Rackham) to “a year if not more” (Bruce). My conclusion is that it occurred from April AD 48 to the spring AD 49 (see G. Michael Cocoris, *The Chronology of the Bible*).

“Now when they had come and gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles” (14:27). Once in Antioch of Syria, Paul and Barnabas reported to the church all that God had done. The emphasis, of course, was on the way God had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.

Wiersbe says, “The amazing thing is that Paul and his associates did all this without the modern means of transportation and communication we possess today. Dr. Bob Pierce used to say to us in Youth for Christ, ‘Others have done so much with so little, while we have done so little with so much!’”

“So, they stayed there a long time with the disciples” (14:28). Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch for a long-time. It was during the time that Paul wrote Galatians.

Summary: In spite of being abused and stoned, Paul persevered in ministry.

Expect problems. Review what happened on this leg of the first missionary journey. At Antioch, Paul preached and was expelled (13:14-52). At Iconium, he performed miracles and was abused (14:1-5). In Lystra (14:6-20), He healed an incurable and was stoned! When Paul wrote to them, he said, “I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus” (Gal. 6:17).

Endure. In spite of it all, he endured the persecution. At the end of his life, Paul speaks of the “persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured. And out of *them* all the Lord delivered me” (2 Tim. 3:11).

When you are discouraged, you need courage. Barclay says, “The outstanding feature of this story is the sheer courage of Paul. When he came to his senses, his first act was to go right back into the city where he had been stoned. It was John Wesley’s advice, “Always look a mob in the face.” There could be no braver thing than Paul’s going straight back amongst those who had tried to murder him. A deed like that would have more effect than a hundred sermons. Men were bound to ask themselves where a man got the courage to act in such a way.”

Exhort. Evangelize. Encourage. Minister to others. Paul and Barnabas continued to minister. Don’t stop working. Produce. Winston Churchill said, “It is not the critic who counts, not the man who points out how the strong man stumbled or where the door of the deed could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who was actually in the arena, whose face is marred about dust and sweat and blood, who strives valdily, who urged and came up short again and again, who knows the great enthusiasm, the great devotions, and spends himself in a worthy cause, who at best knows, in the end, the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails very greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat.”

At the height of his writing career, the eyesight of the famous English poet John Milton began to fail. It is said that he would have become bitter if he had not been a devoted follower of Christ. Instead, as the darkness closed in on him, he squarely faced the problem and resolved to rise above it. He wrote “Sonnet on Blindness.” Among other things, he said, “My soul was thus bent to serve more acceptable my Maker.” After the light faded from his sight, he produced a great epic, “Paradise Lost.”

You will grow if you respond as the Lord would have you respond. Out of his suffering, Paul emerged as a man of trust and deep dependence on the sustaining power of God (Hodges). One of the goals of growth is learning to minister.

WHO IS IN CHARGE HERE?

One of the most basic and fundamental questions that any group can ask is, “Who is in charge here?” Take a simple example. Who is in charge of the family? The father? The mother? The father and mother together? The children? The parents and children together? The same question should be asked of any organization or business. It should even be asked of a church. Who is in charge of the church? Different types of churches give different answers to that question. Answers include a bishop, elders, deacons, trustees, stewards, and the pastor. What is the biblical answer to that question? You should seek an answer to this question because you need to know what the Scripture says and how you fit in a church structure.

The Lord

The Lord The Lord is the head of the church (Eph. 1:22). As head, He has commissioned us to make disciples (Mt. 28:19-20; Acts 2:42; Col. 2:2).

Us Churches are prone to forget the headship of Christ. Traditions and programs not only dethrone Him but also shove Him out the door so that He is on the outside looking in (Rev. 3:20). All church members need to be constantly reminded that Jesus Christ is the head of the church. My brother says, “We must be told once and reminded many times.”

The Elders

All agree the Lord is the head of the church, but He is not here. Obviously, He directs the church through humans. So the question is, who has the human authority?

Apostles If you start at the beginning of the church, the answer is simple. The human beings who are in charge of the church are called apostles. As God the Father sent Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ sent the apostles (Jn. 20:21). The apostles acted as a group (Acts 6:1-4). So, at first, the apostles as a group were the “human” authority over the churches.

The problem for us is that there are no apostles today because to be an apostle, one must have seen the risen Christ (Acts 1:22; 1 Cor. 9:1) and He does not appear to people today. The apostles were the foundation of the church (Eph. 2:20) and the foundation has been laid. Being in the twenty-first century is like being on the 21st floor, not the foundation. So, who has the authority in the church today? The Lord is not here! The apostles are not here! Now what?

The New Testament Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the apostles (and, in some cases, those associated with them) wrote the New Testament. It is the authoritative word for the church today. The old adage is true: “The Bible is the final authority for faith and practice.”

Elders Alright, the New Testament is the final authority for faith and practice in the church, but after the apostles, who was put in charge, humanly speaking? The apostles appointed elders in every church (Acts 14:23), and this verse changed my understanding of the local church. I was saved in a Baptist church. I went to a Baptist college. I was ordained in a Baptist church. Because my “spiritual upbringing” was in a Baptist church, I assumed that Baptists were biblical in that they had a pastor and a board of deacons.

While in seminary, I got into a heated discussion with a fellow who insisted that every church should have a plurality of elders. I “withstood him to the face.” I marched home, opened a concordance, and looked up every reference in the New Testament to elder, deacon, and pastor. As a result of that brief study, I concluded that I could answer every verse—except one or two, which I decided I would deal with later.

Years later, while traveling in my car between Minneapolis, Minnesota and De Moines, Iowa, I was listening to a tape by a Bible teacher. He pointed out that in Acts 14:23, Paul ordained elders (plural) in every church (singular). At 70 miles an hour (the legal speed limit at the time), I made a U-turn (mentally). On the spot, I decided every church should have a plurality of elders.

In the book of Acts, human authority shifted from the apostles as a group to a group from within each church called elders. There was a transition from apostle-rule to elder-rule. For example, in the beginning, money was given to the apostles (Acts 4:35). Later, it was given to the elders (Acts 11:29-30). At first, elders functioned alongside of the apostles (15:4, 6, 22ff.; 16:4; 21:18), but evidently, the church began to be ruled by elders. Ultimately, even Peter (1 Pet. 5:1) and John (2 Jn. 1; 3 Jn. 1), as well as Paul (cf. 1 Tim. 4:14 with 2 Tim. 1:6), identified themselves as elders, not apostles. Thus, the ruling “group within the church” shifted from apostles to elders.

The New Testament teaches that elders are to rule the church (1 Thess. 5:12; 1 Tim. 5:17; Heb. 13:7, 17, 24). That does not mean they were “lords” over the church (1 Pet. 5:3). George Washington is the greatest example of a leader not lording it over those he led. George Washington could have been crowned king of the United States. At the time, the common form of rule everywhere was a monarchy. Many felt that George III would be replaced by their own George I. One colonist wrote, “Had he lived in days of idolatry, he would have been worshiped like a god.” When a brigadier general wrote to Washington, echoing sentiments in the press, that the colony should emerge as a monarchy with him as king, Washington responded, “I must view this with abhorrence and reprehend (it) with severity.” Benjamin West, a Philadelphia artist painting in London on the commission of the King, told George III that despite Washington’s popularity, the general chose to return to his farm in Virginia. The king was astonished. “If Washington does that,” he said, “he will be the greatest man in the world.” Elders are to be servants, not lords.

The Church

As a Whole This concept raises the question of the place of the congregation. The Scripture speaks about the “whole church” (Acts 6:5-6; 15:22; Rom. 16:23; 1 Cor. 14:23). The church was involved in some decisions, such as discipline. The church as a whole worked with the apostles and elders. When the church at Jerusalem decided to write a letter to other churches about the decision they had made, the apostles and the elders did not act as a body separate from the church; they acted in “harmonious conjunction” (Alexander) with the whole church (Acts 15:22).

The whole church did not “rule.” Imagine a couple with four children, an eighteen-year-old, a fifteen-year-old, and a set of ten-year-old twins. Let’s suppose the parents go somewhere for an evening, leaving all the children at home. They would put the eighteen-year-old “in charge.” That does not mean that the eighteen-year-old can make up the rules for the evening. This means that the eighteen-year-old is in charge of seeing to it that the rules and regulations of the parents are being followed. The eighteen-year-old is given responsibility, authority, and accountability.

It does not mean that by majority vote, the children decide to take the second car and go for a joyride.

As Individuals The individuals in the church were occupied with ministry. The church prayed (Acts 2:42). Acts 6 is the first mention of church organization in the New Testament. This passage illustrates that, while the congregation had a role, their part was exercised in conjunction with a group within the church (the apostles) and both the congregation and the apostles delegated the task to individuals. The individuals were responsible for seeing to it that their assigned task was done. Those individuals were accountable to the ones who selected and approved them.

The individuals commissioned in Acts 6 are seen serving—preaching. The church did the work of ministry (Eph. 4:12). In the New Testament, very little is said about the organization. A great deal is said about ministry. The focus of the activity of the church was on ministry.

Summary: The head of the church is Jesus Christ, the Scripture is the final authority, elders rule, and saints serve.

Who is in charge? Not too many (the whole church), not just one (Pastor). A small group of spiritually mature believers should oversee the church to see that God's will is carried out.

Churches often get involved in decisions they should not. It is impractical. Even when small, the whole church is too large a group to discuss the details of many decisions. It would simply take too much time to discuss all the details publicly. So what happens is either a few individuals thoroughly investigate an issue and make a recommendation to the congregation who trusts their judgment and approve it, or the "business" meeting goes on and on until all are satisfied that they have enough information to make an intelligent decision. When the latter course is chosen, people get bored, if not irritated, and do not attend business meetings. The few who do make the decisions! In the first church I pastored, we had a monthly business meeting, which tended to micro-manage everything.

Churches cannot get involved in some decisions. Some decisions should not be discussed publicly anyway. Sometimes, personal information should be part of the decision, but it is the type of information that cannot and should not be publicly discussed. I was on the board of a university that was sued. When the case was settled, the lawyer recommended that only the executive committee know the details and the rest of us were told that we could know on a "need to know" basis.

Furthermore, not all members of the congregation are spiritually mature, and some issues should only be handled by the mature (Gal. 6:1). Getz argues that the weakness of congregationalism is that immature believers are involved in making decisions. A family would not allow a three-year-old to vote on whether or not the family should build a new home, nor allow a young child to vote on the family budget, nor allow a child to be part of deciding the discipline of a brother or sister (Getz, p. 312). His point is legitimate, even if the analogy is not precisely analogous.

From a practical point of view, it is impossible for the congregation to make all the decisions, and this often leads to contention, division, and church splits. I once heard of a church in the South that split over how to fry chicken for the fellowship dinner. That should never have happened. The congregation should not be making those kinds of decisions.

The church's job is not to argue over how to fry chicken. They may decide who picks the fryers, but the focus should be on serving the chicken.

NO SMALL DISPUTE

Throughout the history of the church, there have been disputes. Some have been small and some have been large. Actually, it has been that way from the beginning. Rackham points out that so far in Acts, there has been selfishness, murmuring, and simony (buying and selling of ecclesiastical pardons or offices) and now there is religious controversy. It was no small dispute. It was not a pillow fight or a food fight. It was all-out war. It would not be too much to say that it was the most important dispute in the history of the church. It was over what a person has to do to be accepted by God and the church.

The Dispute

The Defection “And certain *men* came down from Judea and taught the brethren, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved’” (15:1). First, a bit of background. The book of Acts records the gradual acceptance of the Gentiles. Rackham explains that the apostles appointed a circumcised proselyte—Nicolas of Antioch. The preaching of Stephen foreshadowed the change of customs. Philip baptized Samaritans and an Ethiopian eunuch, who was excluded from the covenant by his condition. Peter admitted Cornelius and a party of God-fearing Gentiles. When Paul and Barnabas turned to the Gentiles, the process of expansion was complete. “The River of God’s saving grace had overflowed its banks” (Hughes).

Nevertheless, there was opposition. When Peter baptized Cornelius, “those of the circumcision contended with him” (11:2). After Paul left Galatia, Judaizers came saying that to be saved, men had to be circumcised. Paul wrote Galatians to refute that. Now, while Paul and Barnabas were teaching at Antioch (14:28), unnamed men from Judea came to Antioch and taught the Gentile converts (“brethren”) that they had to be circumcised to be saved. Later at Jerusalem, “some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed” argue, “It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command *them* to keep the Law of Moses” (15:5). Keeping the Law of Moses includes keeping the Sabbath and observing the food laws. Much later, there were “many myriads of Jews” who “believed and they are all zealous for the law” (21:20). This is a faith-plus gospel.

It is inconceivable *to us* that believers would be required to keep the Mosaic Law, but we must remember that Christianity began in Judaism. Rackham explains that when the Jews ventured into the Gentile world, it created tensions. Because of the universal idolatry, superstition, and corruption in the ancient world, Gentiles were attracted to Judaism, but circumcision, the observance of the Sabbath, and abstinence from unclean meat prevented many Gentiles from becoming Jews. Furthermore, the Jewish law of uncleanness prevented any real fellowship between the two (Ezek. 4:13-14; Dan. 1:8). The Jews had their own butchers (Rackham, p. 264). In that environment, Christianity was born. All the early believers were Jews. Circumcision, observance of the Sabbath, and abstinence from unclean meat were ingrained in them from childhood.

The doctrinal question is, “Can a Gentile be saved without being circumcised? Assuming circumcise is not necessary, the practical question is, “Must Gentile believers keep the other Mosaic Laws? Bruce says the issues are 1) the requirements for Gentile church membership

(circumcision) and 2) the means of promoting fellowship between Jewish and Gentile believers (meals together). Rackham says the serious ramifications are: Will there be one unified church or two churches? Will the Gentile believers be in an inferior position, like the God-fears in the synagogue?

The very nature of the church meeting created a major problem. When the church gathered, they shared a meal, including the Lord's Table. This posed the practical problem of table fellowship. Traditionally, the Jews did not eat with Gentiles because the Gentiles did not eat kosher food (Gal. 2:11-14). Any food Gentiles served their Jewish friends would be unclean (Marshall). Kosher meat is meat from a clean animal that has been properly killed to completely drain the blood from the body (Wiersbe).

Ultimately, the issue is law and grace. At the end of the last chapter, Luke set up the clash between law and grace (see "grace" in 14:26 and "faith" in 14:27). The legalistic challenge is a challenge to grace (Hodges). Wiersbe puts it like this. "What were these legalists actually doing and why were they so dangerous? They attempted to mix law and grace and pour the new wine into the ancient brittle wineskins (Luke 5:36-39). They were stitching up the rent veil (Luke 23:45) and blocking the new and living way to God that Jesus had opened when He died on the Cross (Heb. 10:19-25). They were rebuilding the wall between Jews and Gentiles that Jesus had torn down on the cross (Eph. 2:14-16). They were putting the heavy Jewish yoke on Gentile shoulders (Gal. 5:1; Acts 15:10) and asking the church to move out of the sunlight into the shadows (Heb. 10:1; Col. 2:16-17). They were saying, "A Gentile must first become a Jew before he can become a Christian! It is not sufficient for them simply to trust Jesus Christ. They must also obey Moses!"

The Dispute "Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them" (15:2a). The teaching of the men from Judea hit the church like a bombshell where the Gentile believers were uncircumcised and they and the Jewish believers were living together in peace (Rackham). Paul and Barnabas, of course, disagreed with these teachers. The Greek word rendered "dissension" means "standing, insurrection, strife, dissension" (23:7, 23:10). It was used of civil strife (Rackham). The Greek word rendered "dispute" means "seeking, searching, questioning, inquiry, debate." Don't laundry this passage. As a result of the differences between Paul and Barnabas and the men from Judea, there was a hot debate. Alexander describes what happened as "a violent contention and commotion." Wiersbe says it was a declaration of war that Paul and Barnabas could not ignore.

The Delegation "They determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question" (15:2b). The word "they" refers to the brethren (15:1), that is, the church (15:3). The Greek word translated "determined" means "assign, appoint, order" (A-S). In Acts 13:48, it is translated "appointed." Paul and Barnabas were appointed to go to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles and the elders of the church at Jerusalem concerning the question of the Gentiles being circumcised to be saved. The men from Judea probably argued that the church at Jerusalem demanded circumcision (Marshall). Besides, there was the danger of a complete cleavage between the churches of Jerusalem and Judea on the one hand and the church at Antioch on the other (Bruce).

The Journey "So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, describing the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy to all the brethren" (15:3). The church, as a "collective body," sent Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem. As they traveled, they stopped along the way in Phoenicia and Samaria, reporting on the conversion of the Gentiles in Galatia. There was great joy among the Jewish believers that Gentiles were being

saved by faith alone in Christ alone. Thus, Paul and Barnabas arrived in Jerusalem “with all the weight of the northern church at their back” (Rackham).

The Report “And when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders; and they reported all things that God had done with them” (15:4). The Greek word translated “received” means “accept gladly, welcome.” When Paul and Barnabas arrived in Jerusalem, the church, not individuals, warmly welcomed them, as did the apostles and elders. Paul and Barnabas gave a report to the church, apostles, and elders about “the conversion of the Gentiles with the manifest approval of God” (Rackham).

The Opposition “But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, ‘It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses’” (15:5). Some, not all, of the Pharisees, who had believed in Jesus as the Messiah (Alexander), disagreed with Paul and Barnabas, insisting that it was necessary for the Gentile converts to be circumcised and to observe the other requirement to be saved. They wanted the Gentile converts to observe the *whole* Mosaic Law (Alexander). They did not share the point of view of their fellow Pharisee Paul, who preached a law-free gospel (Bruce). It was a colossal step for these dyed-in-the-wool Jews to adopt a new way of thinking (Marshall).

In other words, they said salvation comes by faith-plus—faith-plus circumcision. Today, a faith plus gospel is faith plus the sacraments or faith plus baptism.

The opposition of the Pharisees at Jerusalem came from the Pharisees who had believed. Although they had trusted Christ, their background rose to the foreground when this controversy arose. From the time they were circumcised at eight days old, they had been immersed in Judaism. They had studied the Scriptures from the viewpoint of the Pharisees. Their conditioning was focused on the Mosaic Law. Their reasoning was if Jesus was a Jewish Messiah, anyone who wanted His salvation would have to become a Jew first. “We are all influenced by our backgrounds. We have experienced doctrinal or practical distortion because of past experience or environment. The challenge is identifying these points of error or misemphasis before we drift too far from Christ” (Hughes).

The Deliberations

“Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter” (15:6). The apostles and the elders from the Jerusalem Church came together to consider this matter. The apostles did not undertake to settle the dispute alone, which indicates that the church’s permanent organization around elders had already taken place (Alexander).

In Galatians, Paul describes a visit to Jerusalem (Gal. 2:1-10). Some say the meeting reported here is the same as the one mentioned in Galatians 2 (Alexander; Rackham). Others contend that the visit to Jerusalem in Galatians 2 is the same as the one recorded in Acts 11:29-30, 12:25 (Ramsay; Bruce; Marshall). Each side cites arguments to support its position. One of the major deciding factors is that if Galatians 2 referred to the Jerusalem Council, Paul would have mentioned their decision and quoted the letter. He did not. Therefore, Acts 15 is not the same visit to Jerusalem as described in Galatians 2.

Peter “And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: ‘Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe’” (15:7). After much disputing in the meeting (15:2), Peter related how God had chosen to use him to preach to the Gentiles, so they could hear the Gospel and believe. Alexander says “believe” is believing “in Jesus, admitting him to be the

true Messiah, and trusting in him as the only Savior.” Peter, of course, is referring to his involvement in the conversion of Cornelius in Acts 10:1-48.

“So, God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as *He did to us and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith*” (15:8-9). The Gentiles in the home of Cornelius received the Word, and God received them without their being circumcised (Rackham). Peter proclaims that God knows the heart, gives the Holy Spirit, and purifies the heart when people have faith.

God looks at the internal heart, not the external action, not the practice of the dietary laws. God purifies *the heart*. Barclay points out that “As far as the Law’s claims went, they might have been ceremonially unclean; but God had by his Spirit cleansed their hearts.” Jesus taught that the dietary laws had nothing to do with internal holiness (Mk. 7:1-23) and Peter received a refresher course in Joppa (Acts 10:9-17). He purifies the heart *by faith*, not by obedience to the Mosaic Law (Wiersbe). Rackham says that purification by faith is another form of justification by faith.

God gives the Holy Spirit, not by keeping the Law, but by faith (Acts 10:43-47; Gal. 3:2). Barclay says, “The proof that he had acted rightly was that God had granted his Holy Spirit to these very Gentiles who had been received.” Thus, Peter says God made no distinction between “us” Jews, who have been saved by faith, and the Gentiles. All are saved by faith, apart from the deeds of the Mosaic Law. All doubts are precluded by God Himself (Alexander; see 10:47; 11:17, where Peter used the same argument).

“Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?” (15:10). A proselyte who decided to obey the Mosaic Law was said to “take up the yoke of the kingdom of heaven” (Bruce). Putting the yoke of the Mosaic Law on the neck of Gentile disciples, which neither the Jews past nor present could bear, is going against God. It is trying His patience and forbearance (Alexander). Alexander says that the Law of which Peter speaks is not just the ceremonial Law (the father could and did bear it.), but the “whole law” as distinguished from the gospel. Marshall says the point is the inability of the Jews to gain salvation by means of the Law and hence, its irrelevance as far as salvation is concerned.

“But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they” (15:11). Peter’s conclusion is that Jews are saved the same way as Gentiles—by grace (15:11) through faith (15:7, 9). Notice Peter does not say *they* are saved the way we are saved, but *we* are saved the way they are saved. We ought not to insist that they keep the Law to be saved because we are saved the same way they are (Alexander).

At this point, Peter disappears from the narrative of Acts.

Barnabas and Paul “Then all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles” (15:12). The word “multitude” implies a larger group than the apostles and elders (15:6, 15:22-23), unless the apostles and elders were very numerous (Alexander). Rackham says the word “multitude” was almost a technical term for the whole body of the church. He also says that in his account of the Jerusalem council, Irenaeus speaks of the whole church as having met together (Irenaeus, *Haer.* III 4). Everyone kept silent, meaning there was no further discussion. Barnabas and Paul confirmed Peter’s argument. “Besides Cornelius, other Gentiles had received the word without circumcision and by *signs and wonders* God had declared his acceptance of them” (Rackham; 14:13; Heb. 2:4).

James “And after they had become silent, James answered, saying, ‘Men *and* brethren, listen to me” (15:13). The James who spoke next was the half-brother of Jesus (Gal. 1:19; Barclay),

the author of the epistle of James (Wiersbe). He responded (“answered”) to what Peter (15:14), as well as Barnabas and Paul, had said.

“Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name” (15:14). Using Peter’s Hebrew name, Simon, James starts with Peter’s experience of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles. He calls it a visitation from God, a term used of divine intervention, whether of salvation or judgment (Marshall). The expression “at the first” has been taken to be a reference to the fact Peter had preached to the Gentiles *before* Paul and Barnabas (Alexander), but the expression “after this” (15:15) indicates James is saying first God will take out a people from the Gentiles and after that restore the tabernacle of David (see comments on 15:16).

The point is that preaching the gospel to the Gentiles was not a new thing introduced by Paul and Barnabas. Rather it was practiced long before Peter with the approval of God (Alexander).

“And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written.” After this, I will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up so that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD, even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the LORD who does all these things” (15:15-17). Furthermore, what was done *was in agreement with* (not a fulfillment of) what the prophets predicted. To support this claim, James quotes Amos 9:11-12. Amos contemplates God’s judgment of Israel (Amos 9:10). He pictures the kingdom, called by its divinely appointed king “the tabernacle of David” (Rackham), in ruins. He says God will return and rebuild the kingdom, and Gentiles will be included when He does.

Some say James is saying that the prophecy of Amos was being fulfilled in the conversion of the Gentiles. For example, Bruce says, “The promised extension of the sovereignty of the house of David over the Gentiles is taking place here and now, says James, through the Gentile mission.” He calls the tabernacle of David “the church of the Messiah” (see also Marshall, who speaks of the church replacing the Temple).

James is not saying that the prophecy of Amos 9:11-12 is fulfilled in the church, but in the Millennium. Amos 9:11 says, “on that day,” which refers to the Day of the Lord. James is laying out an order in which things will be done. “First,” God will visit the Gentiles to call out a people for His name (15:14). “After that,” He will return, rebuild the tabernacle of David and Gentiles will seek the Lord (15:16-17).

Walvoord writes, “Instead of identifying the period of Gentile conversion with the rebuilding of the tabernacle of David, it is carefully distinguished by the *first* (referring to Gentile blessing) and *after this* (referring to Israel’s coming glory).” He goes on to say the passage establishes a specific time order: Israel’s blessing will not come until “I return” (Pentecost, *Things to Come*, p. 110). Ryrie notes that James says “after this,” that is, “after the present worldwide witness” and the return of Christ. He goes on to say, “James assured the council that God’s program to Israel had not been abandoned by the coming of the Gentiles into the church” (*Ryrie Study Bible*). It is obvious that the prophecy of Amos must be fulfilled in the Millennium because even though Israel returned to the land after Amos’ time, the kingdom was not rebuilt “as in the days of old” (Amos 9:11), including Edom and other Gentile nations (Amos 9:12).

“Known to God from eternity are all His works” (15:18). The fact that the Gentiles would seek the Lord is not an “afterthought or innovation” but in accordance with the divine plan from the beginning (Alexander).

“Therefore, I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God” (15:19). In the Greek text, the word “I” is emphatic. James concludes that they

should not trouble the Gentiles who are turning to God with the necessity of being circumcised. James does not specifically mention circumcision, but his comment that Jewish believers should start troubling the Gentile converts is the same idea as Peter's pronouncement that they should not place an intolerable yoke on their necks (Bruce).

"But that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, *from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood*" (15:20). At the same time, James also suggests that they write a letter to the Gentile churches telling them to abstain from four things. Three of the four concern food. In other words, the doctrinal issue of the need for circumcision has been settled (15:19). Now, the practical issue of fellowship needs to be addressed.

The things polluted by idols are meats offered to idols (15:29; Alexander). Sexual immorality is self-explanatory. "Things strangled" and "blood" pertain to eating. Animals killed by strangulation still had the blood in them (Marshall; Wiersbe). Therefore, to eat that meat was to consume blood. Consuming blood was forbidden (Gen. 9:4; Lev. 17:11-14; Deut. 12:23). To the Gentiles, eating meat produced by strangling was esteemed a great delicacy (Rackham, p. 264). This was closely connected with idolatry. Attached to great temples were large bands of prostitutes. The practice of immorality was an essential part of the worship of many deities. Such temples were scenes of incredible corruption, "sanctified" by religion. Hence the close association of eating idol meats and fornication (see 1 Cor. 10:7-8; Rev. 2:14-21). "To prohibit idol meats and fornication is to say flee from idolatry" (Rackham, p. 265).

"For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath" (15:21). James explains ("for") that the reason from abstaining from these things is the Law of Moses is read in the synagogues every Sabbath. The word "Sabbath" here does not mean the Lord's Day, the first day of the week, but the Jewish Sabbath, the seventh day of the week (Alexander). Gentile converts should abstain from these things as a concession to the consciences of Jewish converts (Alexander), who have been indoctrinated in the Law of Moses for generations. Rackham says that since these practices were the chief causes of offense to the Jews, out of love, the Gentiles should abstain from them to facilitate harmony with the Jewish brethren (Jas. 3:13-18; see also Marshall).

The instructions in the letter from Jerusalem differ from the instructions given by Paul. When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he said it was permissible to eat meat offered to idols under certain conditions (1 Cor. 8-10), whereas the council at Jerusalem put an absolute prohibition on eating meat offered to idols. The solution to this apparent contradiction is that the instructions from the Jerusalem council were not intended to be universally binding on all Gentile believers. These instructions were written to a specific group ("to them" in 15:20 and "for" in 15:21). In his epistles, Paul never refers to the decision of the Jerusalem council. Rackham says the problem was soon settled by history. The development of the Gentile churches caused the Jewish scruples to fall into the background and when Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70, it "cut away the ground of Judaism not only within the Church but without." Since Augustine, the prohibitions in the Jerusalem letter have been considered temporary (Alexander). In both instances, the point is that believers should be sensitive and loving toward those who have a conscience toward something.

The Decision

The Delegation "Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, *namely, Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren*" (15:22). The Greek word

translated “pleased” means “to suppose, to seem, to think, to please.” It is the Greek word from which comes the English word “dogma.” Alexander says that it connotes “decided or determined.” Just exactly how was this decision made? Alexander says the apostles and the elders did not act as a body separate from the church; they acted in “harmonious conjunction” with the whole church. Rackham says the apostles and elders probably voiced their judgment or vote in turn, and the whole church expressed assent through an acclamation.

At any rate, they chose two leaders from their church to send to the church at Antioch. The Greek word for “leading” used here is used elsewhere of elders (Heb. 13:7, 17, 24). Both were prophets (15:32). Judas was a Hebrew and Silas was a Hellenist (16:37; Rackham). Later, Silas became Paul’s companion in ministry at Philippi, Thessalonica, and Corinth (see also 2 Cor. 1:19; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1). It is generally said that he is the Silvanus of 1 Peter 5:12, although there is no proof for that.

The letter “They wrote this *letter* by them: The apostles, the elders, and the brethren, To the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia: Greetings” (15:23). The apostles, the elders, and the believers in the church at Jerusalem wrote a letter to the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia. The only other use of the term “letter” in the New Testament is in the book of James, which has been regarded as proof that James wrote both epistles (Alexander).

“Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, ‘*You must be circumcised and keep the law;*’ to whom we gave no *such commandment*” (15:24). The letter begins with a correction. The some who supposed “went out from us” were, no doubt, the “certain *men* came down from Judea,” who “taught the brethren, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved’” (15:1).

What these unidentified men said concerning the need to be circumcised “troubled” the Gentile converts, “unsettling their souls.” The Greek word translated “troubled” means “to disturb, trouble, stir up, perplexed.” Rackham says they were cast into confusion. The Greek word rendered “unsettling” means “to dismantle, ravage, destroy, subvert.” These Gentile believers were perplexed; their lives (“souls”) were being dismantled and destroyed. Alexander says their peace was destroyed because of insinuations that God did not accept them.

“It seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (15:25-26). The expression “it seemed good to us” is the translation of the same Greek verb that is rendered “pleased” in Acts 15:22. The assembly of apostles and elders, as well as the congregation (15:23), were pleased to send several with Barnabas and Paul. The letter adds Barnabas and Paul were dedicated to the Lord to the point of risking their lives for Him.

“We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who will also report the same things by word of mouth” (15:27). The Greek word translated “sent” is the one from which comes the English word “apostle.” Judas and Silas would report orally what was in the letter. The main subject of the letter is the accrediting of Judas and Silas (Rackham). Since the trouble was caused by unauthorized visitors from Jerusalem (15:1), it was important to fully accredit the present delegates (Bruce; see also Marshall).

Barclay says, “Had Paul and Barnabas come back alone, their enemies might have doubted that they brought back a correct message; Judas and Silas were official emissaries and guarantors of the reality of the decision. The Church was wise in sending a person as well as a letter. One of the earliest Christian writers declared that he had learned more from the living and abiding voice than from any amount of reading. A letter could have sounded coldly official, but the words of

Judas and Silas added a friendly warmth that the bare reception of a letter could never have achieved. Any amount of trouble might be avoided many a time if only a personal visit is paid instead of someone being content with sending a letter.”

“For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell” (15:28-29). The letter goes on to explain (“for”) that Judas and Silas would report that it pleased (15:22, 25) the Holy Spirit, the apostle, the elders, and the congregation to lay no greater burden on Gentile converts than to abstain from the few things they had decided on in their meeting (15:20-22). The Holy Spirit communicated thought through one of the prophets (15:32). The letter concludes by telling the Gentile converts that if they abstain from the things listed in the letter, they will do well, but they will not be saved. Such abstinence was “necessary” because it would promote peaceful relations with the Jew believers (Rackham).

By the way, this means that the Jews who insisted that the Gentiles must be circumcised lost the argument and agreed to follow what Peter, James, and the others decided. Apparently, they accepted the defeat without bitterness (Marshall).

Jesus gave the apostles the keys to the kingdom (Mt. 16:19; 18:18). The keys of the kingdom are often interpreted to mean the authority to admit or exclude people from the church, but this expression does not refer to the forgiveness of sins. Jesus says, “whatsoever,” not “whomsoever.” Another explanation is that to the Jews, “keys” represented the authority that belonged to the scribes, that is, those who taught the law (Toussaint on Mt. 16:19). Binding and loosing were technical terms for the verdict of a teacher of the oral law who declared some actions “bound,” that is, forbidden and others “loosed,” that is, permitted. The apostles used the keys here when they bound and loosed regarding eating things sacrificed to idols.

Concerning how they made this decision, Rackham says, “In the procedure, we also recognize the church acting as a whole in due order. In all great societies, however democratic in their constitution, the practical administration of affairs must fall into the hands of a smaller or selected assembly, such as the Greek *Boule* and the Roman *Senate*, the Jewish *Sanhedrin* and the modern *Parliament*. Similarly, in these bodies, the initiative and control centers in a small committee of the leaders, whether magistrates or high-priests, or cabinet ministers. So, in the church, we find the same three elements: (1) the multitude, (2) the senate of apostles and presbyters, (3) the apostles. Only there is this difference. The two smaller bodies possess, besides their authority of personal influence, a definite commission received from above by the apostles from the Lord directly, by the presbyters from the apostles through laying on of hands. Now in the council, we see the three elements cooperating in their due order. (1) The senate of apostles and presbyters is summoned (verse 6): it is mainly their business as the responsible authorities to discuss the matter, and they give their opinions or votes (verses 22, and 12 Bezan): the letter of the council runs in their name. (2) But in this senate, the apostles take the leading part. They sum up the discussion at the end, and their speeches, which are alone recorded, decide the voice of the assembly. Further, we learn from S. Paul that they had previously discussed with him in private the more doctrinal side of the matter, his gospel, and come to an agreement thereupon. (3) The popular element is not wanting, viz. ‘the multitude’ of so to speak enfranchised citizens of the church. They are present (see Rackham, p. 249), and their consent is emphatically expressed (verse 22): without it the mind of the whole church would not have been expressed. There was still (4) a further body to consider, the church of Antioch, which represents distant churches who must have a voice in the decision if it is to be the mind of the universal church. This church was

represented by delegates, and besides this, the decision was sent to it in the form of a letter for its acceptance. The brethren of Antioch accepted it with joy. What would have happened if they had refused, we are not told” (Rackham, p. 268). Rackham goes on to say that there is an interesting parallel to be found in 2 Chronicles 30.

The Delivery

The Letter “So when they were sent off, they came to Antioch; and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the letter” (15:30). When they arrived at Antioch, Barnabas, Paul, Judas, and Silas gathered at the church together and read the letter to them.

“When they had read it, they rejoiced over its encouragement” (15:31). The Gentile believers rejoiced over the encouragement. The Greek word translated “encouragement” means “to call, admonish, exhort, cheer, encourage, comfort.” The latter comforted them in that they did not have to keep the Mosaic Law to be saved and it encouraged them to be sensitive to Jewish believers.

The Messengers “Now Judas and Silas, themselves being prophets also, exhorted and strengthened the brethren with many words” (15:32). The prophets, Judas and Silas, who had come with Barnabas and Paul from Jerusalem, also exhorted (the same Greek word that is translated “encouragement” in 15:31) and strengthened the Gentile believers. The Greek word translated “strengthened” means “to make strong, confirm” (see comments on 14:22). The Gentile believers were established by instruction and exhortation (Alexander). Rackham says the exhortation was, no doubt, an earnest appeal for unity and mutual love, which means they established the church (made it firm), after its recent division.

“And after they had stayed *there* for a time, they were sent back with greetings from the brethren to the apostles” (15:33). The congregation at Antioch sent Judas and Silas back to Jerusalem with greetings to the apostles.

Those who Remained “However, it seemed good to Silas to remain there” (15:34). It seemed good (15:22, 25, 28) to Silas to remain at Antioch (15:35).

“Paul and Barnabas also remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also” (15:35). At this point, Paul, Barnabas, Silas, and many others were teaching and preaching at Antioch. They were teaching the saints and evangelizing (see Alexander; Marshall).

Summary: When some Jewish believers insisted that the Gentile believers must be circumcised to be saved, the apostles, elders, and the church at Jerusalem decided that Gentiles did not have to be circumcised to be saved, but they should abstain from immorality and foods that offended Jewish believers.

Two great questions were settled at this conference. The first was the issue of salvation. The need to circumcision was rejected. It was decided that the sole condition for salvation was faith alone in Christ alone. The second was the issue of fellowship. On the one hand, the Gentile believers were not required to be circumcised, observe the Sabbath, or keep the whole Mosaic Law. On the other hand, since they held a “love feast,” during which they observed the Lord’s Supper (a church potluck), the Gentiles were urged to abstain from those foods that were offensive to Jewish believers. In other words, both sides should operate on the basis of faith and love.

Wiersbe says, "It is beautiful to see that this letter expressed the loving unity of people who had once been debating with each other and defending opposing views. The legalistic Jews willingly gave up insisting that the Gentiles had to be circumcised to be saved, and the Gentiles willingly accepted a change in their eating habits. It was a loving compromise that did not in any way, affect the truth of the Gospel. As every married person and parent knows, there are times in a home when compromise is wrong, but there are also times when compromise is right."

Wise Samuel Johnson said, "Life cannot subsist in society but by reciprocal concessions. The person who is always right, and who insists on having his or her own way, is difficult to live with happily." He adds that problems are opportunities to grow, as are temptations for dissension and division. He speaks of a church that split over whether the organ or the piano should be on the right side of the platform. He also says believers need to learn the art of loving compromise. Hughes points out that we "push our preferences on others. We assume that they will either do the things our way or they are not spiritual."

We major on minors. Winston Churchill tells of a family that went on a picnic. In the course of the afternoon, their five-year-old son fell into the lake. Unfortunately, none of the adults could swim. As the adults on the shore panicked, a passerby saw the situation, dove fully clothed into the lake, and managed to rescue the child. When he presented the boy safe and sound to his mother, instead of thanking the stranger for his heroic efforts, the mother snapped at the rescuer, "Where's Johnny's hat?" Instead of rejoicing in her son's deliverance, the woman found some picky point over which to make an issue. We do that when we make something more than the gospel that is needed for others to measure up.

When we see the big picture, small issues do not matter. A college girl wrote her parents, "Just thought I'd drop you a note to clue you in on my plans. I have fallen in love with a guy called Jim. He quit high school after grade eleven to get married. About a year ago, he got a divorce. We have been going steady for two months and plan to get married in the fall. At any rate, I dropped out of school last week, although I'd like to finish college sometime in the future." On the next page, the letter continued, "I just want you to know that everything I have written so far in this letter is false. NONE of it is true. But, Mom and Dad, it *is* true that I got a C- in French and flunked Math. And it *is* true that I am going to need some more money for my tuition payments."

What may sound like bad news may not be so bad when seen from a different perspective. Hughes says, "For the believers in Antioch, a few minor restrictions in relation to their Hebrew brothers were nothing compared to the burden of the Law. Compared with what the Jerusalem Council could have insisted upon, the final recommendation was a great relief."

WHEN GODLY MEN DIFFER

Humans are different and have differences. That is not a revelation. The surprise is that godly people differ over, of all things, God's work! Actually, that should not shock us either because church history is littered with the carnage from the battles between spiritual leaders. The question is, "How do godly men handle that?"

The Conflict

Paul's Plan "Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, 'Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing'" (15:36). Marshall makes the interesting suggestion that the "some days" spent in Antioch were winter months and that when spring came, travel routes by land and sea were opened, stirring Paul to fresh activity. "For the Apostle Paul, the church at Antioch was not a parking lot: it was a launching pad" (Wiersbe). The purpose of the trip was to see how the converts were doing spiritually. At this point, there is no mention of visiting new places.

Paul suggested that he and Barnabas return to all the cities where they had preached the gospel (Alexander). Hughes points out that up until this point, Paul and Barnabas had worked well together. Barnabas had retrieved Paul from Tarsus to help with the ministry in Antioch. "Their teamwork had been charmed with grace" (Hughes). Hughes goes on to point out that Barnabas's relational gifts, coupled with Paul's brilliant intellect, produced dramatic results. They shared vision and wounds; they were soul brothers. Perhaps they had an occasional disagreement but never dreamed of being separated, except perhaps by death.

Barnabas's Bias "Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark" (15:37). The Greek word translated "determined" means "deliberate, resolve, consider." Alexander says "determined" is too strong. He says it simply means Barnabas "*intended, purposed, or that such was his design and plan*" (Alexander, italics his).

In the middle of the first missionary journey, John Mark suddenly abandoned the mission to return home. Evidently, now he wanted to accompany Paul and Barnabas on the second journey. He was the kind of man who encouraged others, so the early church named him "son of encouragement" (4:36). Hence, He championed John Mark joining them. Besides, John Mark was his cousin (Col. 4:10). Barnabas "kept on insisting" (Wuest, *Expanded Translation*) that John Mark be allowed to accompany them.

Paul's Position "But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work" (15:38). In the Greek text, the word translated "insisted that they should not take" means "to deem worthy, to think fit" (Lk. 7:7; 2 Thess. 1:11; 1 Tim. 5:17; Heb. 3:3, 10:29; see Acts 28:22; the KJV says "thought not good" and the NIV renders it "think it not wise"). Alexander says here it means "demanded, insisted," adding that based on its usage in the New Testament, it at least implies that Paul did not think John Mark was fit or worthy to be taken with them. Rackham says John Mark was not worth having taken his hand back from the plough.

The text does not explain why John Mark left the first missionary journey. Guesses include the hardship of the trip, sickness, disagreement over Paul's leadership, a pampered upbringing,

and even homesickness. “Whatever the reason, Paul considered it desertion!” (Hughes). “The ministry was too important, and the work too demanding, to enlist someone who might prove unreliable” (Wiersbe).

Some saints depart. The reason Paul opposed taking John Mark was that on the first trip, John Mark departed from them (13:13). The Greek word translated “departed” means “to revolt, withdraw, depart, fall away, apostatize (Lk. 8:13; Heb. 3:12).

Godly men differ over God’s work, including Paul and Barnabas. Paul said he and Barnabas were “men with the same nature” as other humans (14:15). Godly people are not angels but humans. Believers sometimes disagree with each other—intensely disagree. “All Christians walk with limps” (Hughes).

In fact, some of the church’s greatest leaders were difficult people. Martin Luther said of himself, “I am rough, boisterous, stormy, and altogether war-like, fighting against innumerable monsters and devils, I am born for the removing of stumps and stones cutting away thistles and thorns, and clearing wild forest” (Luther, cited by Hughes). Something similar could be said of other outstanding Christian leaders. A nationally known Christian leader once said to me, “all preachers have feet of clay.”

In this case, the problem is whether to place the interest of the individual or the work as a whole first. As Marshall remarks, there is no rule of thumb when dealing with such problems. Wiersbe says, “Good and godly people in the church do disagree; this is one of the painful facts of life that we must accept. Paul looked at people and asked, “What can they do for God’s work?” while Barnabas looked at people and asked, “What can God’s work do for them?” Both questions are important to the Lord’s work, and sometimes it is difficult to keep things balanced.”

The Conclusion

The Contention “Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another (15:39a). The Greek word translated “then” means “therefore.” Because they were divided in their opinion, contention arose between them (Alexander). The Greek word translated “contention” means “stimulation, provocation” (Heb. 10:24), “irritation” (Acts 15:39). The verb form means “to spur on, stimulate, to provoke, arouse to anger” (Acts 17:16; 1 Cor. 13:5). Alexander says that the idea of anger is suggested by the root and confirmed by the usage of the verbal root. He goes on to say that this was a temporary irritation. He adds that it served the divine purpose of multiplying labors. Hughes says the Greek word denotes “violent action or emotion,” adding, “this was not a mild gentleman’s disagreement but an intense and passionate conflict!”

The Separation The Greek word translated “parted” means “to separate, part asunder” (Rev. 6:14). Alexander says it denotes “violent division or forcible separation.” This sounds serious, but before you jump to that conclusion, consider the rest of the story.

The Compromise

Barnabas And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus” (15:39b). Barnabas took his cousin John Mark and went to Cyprus, the place of their origin. Barclay comments, “Mark was supremely fortunate that he had a friend like Barnabas. In the end, as we know, Mark became the

man who redeemed himself. It may well have been his friendship with Barnabas that gave Mark back his self-respect and determined him to make good. It is great for a man to have someone who believes in him. Barnabas believed in Mark and, in the end, Mark justified that belief.”

Paul “But Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God” (15:40). Paul chose Silas to accompany him on his missionary journey. Silas was a leading member of the Jerusalem church (15:22), a prophet (15:32), who was chosen to take the Jerusalem conference decrees to the churches (15:27). He was also a Roman citizen (16:37-38). Later, he co-authored with Paul of the Thessalonian epistles, and, perhaps, he was the secretary for Peter’s first epistle (1 Pet. 5:12).

After Paul chose Silas, the brethren commended them to the grace of God. Alexander says, “The inference usually drawn from the omission of any similar expression as to Barnabas and Mark, to wit, that their mission was without authority, divine or human, seems a little forced since Luke is writing the history of Paul as the Apostle of the Gentiles and had mentioned the dispute with Barnabas at all, only to account for the subsequent appearance of Silas as his substitute. It is equally admissible, and much more pleasant, to suppose that the ‘paroxysm,’ although directly caused by human frailty, was a providential means of sending out four men instead of two on the same errand but in different directions, so as at the same time to avoid collision and enlarge the field of missionary labor. This hypothesis is favored by the fact that it supposes the leader of each mission to have gone again to his own country (see above, on 13:4, 13), and the two to have revisited, apart but simultaneously, the whole field of their first joint mission; whereas if Barnabas went forth without authority, Paul’s proposal of a second visitation (see above, on v. 36) was not realized at all in relation to the island where he may be said to have achieved his first conquest, and indeed to have been first acknowledged as the apostle of the Gentiles (see above on 13:9.) This view of the matter also supersedes the disagreeable necessity of inquiring whether Paul was chargeable with undue rigor or Barnabas with nepotism, or both, or neither, all which alternatives have been maintained. The simplest and most satisfactory conclusion is that the “paroxysm” here recorded was permitted to take place for the important reasons which have been suggested and had no ulterior effects whatever on the mutual relations of the three men, whom we find in several of Paul’s epistles reunited in the closest bonds of Christian friendship (see 2 Cor. 9:6; Col. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:11; Phlm. 24).” Alexander goes on to point out that something similar happened before when Paul and Barnabas had a difference of opinion (Gal. 2:13).

Hughes says, “Silas brought to Paul’s ministry some ingredients that Barnabas did not have. He was a Roman citizen (16:37). He was a prophet (15:32). He probably spoke Greek (compare 15:22, 32). And he served as Paul’s stenographer (1 Thessalonians 1: 1; 2 Thessalonians 1: 1; compare Peter 5: 12). Though Barnabas was a great loss, Silas was a great gain.”

“And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches” (15:41). Luke says Paul (“he”) went through Syria and Cilicia. Paul was the leader of the mission and the apostle of the Gentiles. Although he was a prophet (15:32), Silas held a subordinate position (Alexander). Alexander points out that Syria and Cilicia were regions of which Antioch and Tarsus were the capitals, and to the Gentile converts, of which the epistle from Jerusalem was formally addressed (15:23.). This route was the natural and necessary course to be pursued to go by land from Antioch into Asia Minor. The Gospel had most probably been first preached in Cilicia, and perhaps in the adjacent parts of Syria, by Paul himself, a few years after his conversion (9:30; 15:23).

Paul strengthened the churches. The Greek word translated “strengthened” means “to make strong, confirm” (see comments on 14:22). The churches were strengthened by instruction and exhortation (see comments on 15:32). Alexander thinks the strengthening included organization.

Summary: When Godly men differ over non-essentials, they work out a God-honoring compromise.

Paul and Barnabas compromised as peers. If one had been in authority over the other, the submission would have been in order. Peers compromise. Subordinates submit. Paul and Barnabas refuse to compromise on essentials, namely, the gospel (15:1-2). Paul and Barnabas were willing to compromise on non-essentials, such as kosher food (15:22-31). Luke does not relate the dispute between Paul and Barnabas in such a way as to indicate one was right and the other wrong (Bruce). Granted, they had a heated argument and they went their separate ways, but even though they were probably angry when they argued, they did not part in anger. They compromised the work assignment and remained friends. Years later, Paul speaks as if he and Barnabas were of one mind (1 Cor. 9:6; Rackham).

Hodges says that Mark is included in the narrative for literary reasons. He explains that once Jerusalem ratified the Pauline mission, Jerusalem, the apostles and Barnabas disappeared from Acts. Only Paul remains. Mark is linked with Jerusalem. When he leaves Paul, he returns to Jerusalem (13:13). From a literary point of view, Mark appears only as a Jerusalem figure who is reluctant to see the Pauline mission through to the end. He is a contract to Timothy, who is a link with the Gentile mission. Hodges adds that “all successful ministry and marriages require accommodation.” Paul gets a fresh start with a new team for his Gentile mission. Hodges makes an interesting point, but Silas goes with Paul, and he is associated with Jerusalem.

“All government, indeed every human benefit and enjoyment, every virtue and every prudent act, is founded on compromise and barter (Edmund Burke, “Speech on Conciliation with America,” March 22, 1775). It has been said that the great goal of all common sense is compromise (William Bolitho, *Twelve against the Gods*, “Mahomet”).

The famous “Serenity Prayer” speaks of wisdom to know when to do what.

God grant me the serenity
To accept the things I cannot change;
Courage to change the things I can;
And the wisdom to know the difference.

Living one day at a time;
Enjoying one moment at a time;
Excepting the hardships as the pathway to peace;
Taking, as He did, this sinful world
As it is, not as I would have it;
Trusting that He will make all things right
If I surrender to His will;
That I may be reasonably happy in this life
And supremely happy with Him
Forever in the next.
Amen.

Reinhold Niebuhr

In 1818, Missouri applied for statehood. At the time, there were twenty-two states. Eleven were “free” states, where slavery was not allowed, and eleven were “slave” states, where slavery was permitted. Missouri wanted to join the Union as a slave state, thus disrupting the delicate balance between “slave” and “free.” If there were more “slave” states than “free” states, the South would have had a majority in the Senate. If there were more “free” states than “slave” states, the North would have the advantage. Needless to say, allowing Missouri to enter the Union was a hot topic of debate. The conflict was resolved with a creative compromise. The northern part of Massachusetts would carve-out of Massachusetts a new “free” state named Maine.

Congress knew the “slave” versus “free” state debate would not end with Missouri. Other territories, once owned by France but sold to the United States in the Louisiana Purchase, would create the same issue when its residents applied for statehood. Senators, therefore, drafted an amendment to their Missouri-Maine bill, mandating that all territory “which lies north of thirty-six degrees and thirty minutes north latitude” would not allow slavery. Thirty-six degrees and thirty minutes north latitude is another way of describing Missouri’s southern boundary.

On March 2, 1820, the House voted (90 to 87) to allow Missouri to be a slave state and agreed (134 to 42) to prohibit slavery in the Louisiana Territory north of the 36° 30’ latitude line. With Maine and Missouri newly admitted, America had twelve “free” and twelve “slave” states.

For the next thirty-four years, states were admitted into the Union two by two—one free and one slave. The Missouri Compromise held for thirty-four years until the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 repealed it. Then, in 1857, the Supreme Court decided the *Dred Scott case*, holding that Congress could not prohibit slavery in any of the country’s territories. The Missouri Compromise did not solve the “slave” issue. That took a civil war, but it was a creative solution to the dilemma of allowing Missouri into the Union.

PAUL'S "MISTAKE"

Paul has been accused of making a mistake, a big mistake. He has been charged with being inconsistent and even hypocritical. He refused to have Titus circumcised and turned around and had Timothy circumcised! This raises the question of how Paul made decisions and what it says about how we should make decisions.

Timothy

A Son "Then he came to Derbe and Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father was Greek" (16:1). As Paul ("he") began his journey, he entered the south-eastern region part of the province of Galatia (Bruce), stopping at Derbe and Lystra. Paul had visited both of these cities on his first missionary journey (14:6). Paul's first missionary journey took place between the spring of AD 48 and the spring of AD 49. This second journey began in the spring of AD 50 (see G. Michael Cocoris, *The Chronology of the Bible*). Derbe and Lystra are listed in reverse order here compared to the previous reference to them (14:6) because Paul is approaching them from the opposite direction (Bruce; Marshall).

By using the word "behold," Luke dramatically calls attention to Timothy, the son of a Jewish mother and a Greek father. His Jewish mother was a believer. His Greek father was not, indicated by the fact that Luke says the mother believed but does not say that about his father and the fact that Timothy was not circumcised (16:3). Since Lystra is last in the list of the two places named, Timothy was probably from there (Marshall).

Timothy was not only the son of a mixed marriage, he was a son of God. Paul was Timothy's spiritual father (1 Cor. 4:17; Phil. 2:22; 1 Tim. 1:2, 18; 2 Tim. 1:2, 2:1). Paul led Timothy to the Lord, no doubt, on the first missionary journey (Marshall). He probably also led Timothy's mother, Eunice (1 Tim. 1:5), to the Lord on that first visit. It has been suggested that Paul made an impression on Timothy like Stephen had made an impression on Paul. Paul had watched the stoning of Stephen. At Lystra, Paul had gone through Stephen's experience, except he was not killed. When Timothy saw it was drawn to Christ for whom Paul was willing to suffer (Hughes).

A Spiritually-minded Believer "He was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium" (16:2). Timothy was a disciple (16:1) who had really grown in the Lord. Since trusting Christ, he had grown in the faith and had a good testimony among believers at Lystra and Iconium.

A Servant "Paul wanted to have him go on with him. And he took *him* and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew that his father was Greek" (16:3). Timothy became a servant. One of the reasons Paul selected Timothy to accompany him was probably his connection with both Jews and Gentiles. His mother was Jewish, so he had a connection with Jews. His father was a Gentile, so he could relate to Gentiles. The problem is that he had not been circumcised and the Jews knew that because they knew his father was a Gentile. Therefore, Paul had him circumcised.

"And as they went through the cities, they delivered to them the decrees to keep, which were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem" (16:4). As Paul and Timothy ("they"), as

well as Silas (15:40), traveled from Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch (Alexander), they delivered the decree the apostles and elders at Jerusalem had issued. This demonstrates that Paul had not changed his mind; circumcision was not required to be saved.

Timothy was circumcised and immediately traveled with Paul to tell believers they did not have to be circumcised! Having Timothy circumcised appears to be a contradiction on Paul's part. Earlier, he had refused to have Gentiles circumcised (Gal. 2:1-5; 5:1-2). Paul was not being inconsistent. Earlier, the issue was being circumcised *in order to be saved* (15:1-2). Here, the issue is not salvation but service (Wiersbe). In other words, to Paul, circumcision and uncircumcision were nothing in themselves (Gal. 5:6; 6:15). They only had value in removing offense or paving the way for preaching the gospel (Rackham). Paul himself explains, "For though I am free from all *men*, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those *who are* under the law, as under the law, that I might win those *who are* under the law; to those *who are* without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those *who are* without law; to the weak, I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all *men*, that I might, by all means, save some" (1 Cor. 9:19-22). Paul circumcised Timothy to maintain his link with the synagogues (Bruce). Paul used wisdom.

In his commentary on I Timothy, Plummer says, "The inconsistency is more apparent than real. It was an instance of his becoming "all things to all men" for the salvation of souls, and of his sacrificing his own convictions in matters that were not essential, rather than cause others to offend. Timothy's father had been a Gentile, and the son, though brought up in his mother's faith, had never been circumcised. To St. Paul, circumcision was a worthless rite. The question was whether it was a harmless one. This depended upon circumstances. If, as among the Galatians, it caused people to rely upon the Law and neglect the Gospel, it was a superstitious obstacle without compromise. But if it was a passport whereby preachers, who would otherwise be excluded, might gain access to Jewish congregations, then it was not only a harmless but a useful ceremony. In the synagogue, Timothy, as an uncircumcised Jew, would have been an intolerable abomination and would never have obtained a hearing. To free him from this crippling disadvantage, St. Paul subjected him to a rite that he himself knew to be obsolete. Then followed the ordination, performed with great solemnity by the laying on of the hands of all the elders of the congregation, and the newly ordained Evangelist forthwith set out to accompany Paul and Silas in their labors for the Gospel Wherever they went, they distributed copies of the decrees of the Apostolic Council at Jerusalem, which declared circumcision to be unnecessary for the Gentiles" (Plummer, pp. 22-23).

"So, the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily" (16:5). In the Greek text, the word translated "so" is the word "therefore." By delivering the message of the Jerusalem Council, the churches were strengthened. The Greek word translated "strengthen" means "to make firm, solid, to strengthen, makes strong." This verb form is only used here and in Acts 3:16, but the noun form, which means "hard, firm, solid, steadfast," appears in 2 Timothy 2:19 and in 1 Peter 5:9 (6:7; 9:3). Alexander says this is the opposite of doubt and vacillation. He also says that "in the faith" is not merely the doctrine of Christ, but their belief of it and trust in Him. The effect of their visit was to establish the churches and make them more effective in evangelism (Marshall).

Some believe that Acts 16:5 marks a major division in the book of Acts (see the discussion of structure in the Introduction). Rackham says that Acts 16:6 begins a new division in Acts but concedes that the paragraph begins with Acts 16:5 grammatically.

Today's Christians seem to have little zeal for winning people to Christ. How few are really active in the ministry of evangelism? Someone has said, "The greatest spectator sport in America today seems to be the Sunday morning worship service." All sit like sponges, taking in everything. Few seem motivated to "squeeze the sponge" during the week. Statistics indicate that 75 percent of the people never do any work in the church and 95 percent never witness to anyone outside the church. The church will grow when members actively give out what they have received. It's time to quit watching the game and to get in the game.

On a Saturday evening, symphony conductor John Barbirolli directed a concert with the 100-piece Halle Orchestra in a Sunday building used for church services. A huge crowd filled the auditorium. When the concert was over, a man said to Dr. John Dowell, the minister, "When will you have this place full on Sunday evening?" Dr. Dowell replied, "I shall fill this place when, like John Barbirolli, I have with me 100 trained and disciplined men to assist me!"

Travels

The Restriction "Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, the Holy Spirit forbade them to preach the word in Asia" (16:6). Having passed through the regions of Phrygia and Galatia, Paul and his companions wanted to head into "the interior of Asia Minor" (Alexander). Paul's original plan was to "go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing" (15:36). At this point, Paul and his traveling companions have determined to go beyond the original plan.

The Holy Spirit hindered them from preaching in Asia. The Greek word translated "forbidden" means "to hinder, restraint, forbid, withhold." How the Holy Spirit communicated to them is not stated. Was it by external circumstances? The man who led me to Christ wanted to and planned to be a missionary but was not able to go to the mission field because of a sick son. Or was it by a prophetic utterance? Two in the company were prophets and the warnings of Acts 21:11 and Acts 20:23 may suggest an analogy (Rackham). It was by an "express command" (Alexander). Paul's plans were overruled. "What is obvious to man is not always the choice of God" (Rackham). Even an apostle was not always clear concerning God's will for their ministry (Wiersbe).

"After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them" (16:7). When they reached Mysia in the northwest province of Asia Minor (Alexander), they desired to go into Bithynia but again they were not permitted by the Holy Spirit to do that either. The book of Acts is about the continuing work of the risen Christ by the Holy Spirit. Paul ended up going west because of a closed door (Hughes). Years later, Peter wrote "to the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia" (1 Pet. 1:1).

The Vision "So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas" (16:8). They passed through Mysia without preaching there (Rackham). Then, they arrived at Troas, a seaport near the site of the ancient city of Troy (Alexander).

"And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us'" (16:9). Paul had a vision of a man from Macedonia pleading with him to come to Macedonia. The call for help was a call to preach the gospel (16:10). This vision constitutes a new "call" corresponding to the call recorded in Acts 13:1-3. The word "call" is used in both places (Rackham). Macedonia has been taken as a reference not only to a specific place but also as a reference to Europe (Alexander). Rackham,

however, states that the Macedonian man did not say to come to Europe but to Macedonia. He adds that to the Romans, Syria was the first province of the East.

“Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them” (16:10). At this point, for the first time, Luke uses the word “we,” indicating, perhaps, this physician named Luke (Col. 4:10) was from Troas. Did Luke join Paul to take care of his physical infirmities? At any rate, Luke joined the party at Troas. In Acts 17:1, “we” is changed to “they,” suggesting that Luke reminded in Philippi after Paul’s departure (Wiersbe). Later, there are two other “we” sections in Acts (20:5-15 and 27:1-28-16).

Paul received a vision that revealed God’s will. God does not use visions to communicate to us today. He communicates to us through His Word. For Paul to determine God’s will by means of a vision is the same as us discerning God’s will through His Word. God’s will involves what *not to do* as well what *to do*. God sometimes reroutes people. They think it is a detour. Someone has said, “A detour is not a disaster.” Phillips Brooks failed as a school teacher, but he went into the ministry and became a mighty preacher.

“Authentic turning points in history are few, but surely among them, that of a Macedonian vision ranks high” (Richard Longenecker, *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* cited by Hughes). Columbus setting sail from Spain is an example of a turning point in history.

Summary: In circumcising Timothy and in determining where to minister, Paul made decisions based on God’s will and God’s wisdom, not on his will and wisdom, with great results.

An article in *Our Daily Bread* tells the story of a beautiful young girl who decided to be a missionary. She began to prepare herself to go to India, but, much like Paul, she seemed temporarily “forbidden.” Her mother became completely disabled and for three years, she needed to minister to her mother. Just after her mother was called to be with the Lord, this dedicated young woman was summoned to see her dying sister. Once more, her services were required, and she was forced to wait until the end came. Again, her eyes turned toward India, but her sister’s husband suddenly died, leaving five young orphaned children with no one on earth to care for them but herself. “No more prospects of going to the heathen,” she wrote to a friend, “This lonely household seems to be my mission.” Although greatly disappointed, she cheerfully submitted to the will of God and set herself with loving devotion to her task. For fifteen years, she ministered to them. In her forty-fifth year, God finally showed her the key to the mystery of her unanswered prayers and revealed why He had held her back from going to India. On that day, she laid her hand in blessing on the heads of three of those young children whom she ‘had mothered as they set sail as,’ missionaries to the land where, 20 years before, she had longed to give her life in service. Her broken plans had been replaced by God’s larger and better one. She could not go, but three went in her stead! While “forbidden to preach” in India, she had delivered such a powerful sermon at home that it had borne three hundred percent interest! Do you wonder she underscored Romans 8:28 in her Bible that day? (*Our Daily Bread*, 3/8/67).

GOD IS WORKING

We sometimes get so absorbed in the routine of life that we don't see God at work. In fact, we can get so caught up in the details of daily living that we wonder if God is working at all. That can happen in ministry. Is God working? How is He working? The book of Acts describes the Lord's work by the Holy Spirit through the apostles. Paul's experiences in Philippi are a vivid picture of God at work. More space is allotted to Philippi than Thessalonica, the capital of the province, Athens, or Corinthian (Rackham). Rackham says the presence of Luke accounts for the disproportionate space allotted to Philippi.

The Generous Lady

The Journey "Therefore, sailing from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and the next day came to Neapolis" (16:11). Because of the Macedonian vision (16:9 and "therefore" in 16:11), Paul and his companions crossed the Aegean Sea, stopping at Samothrace, an island midway between Troas and Neapolis (Alexander) and landing at Neapolis. The winds were favorable (Bruce). The 125-mile trip took two days (Rackham; Hughes say it was 156 miles). Later, it took five days (20:6). Neapolis was Philippi's seaport, which was 10 miles inland (Rackham; Bruce, Marshall).

"And from there to Philippi, which is the foremost city of that part of Macedonia, a colony. And we were staying in that city for some days" (16:12). Paul and his party stopped at Philippi. It was the foremost city in that part of Macedonia. It was not the capital, which was Thessalonica. Barclay writes, "Philippi was a Roman colony. Roman colonies were usually strategic centers. In them, Rome planted little groups of army veterans who had completed their military service. They wore Roman dress, spoke the Roman language, and used Roman laws no matter where they were. Nowhere was there greater pride in Roman citizenship than in these outposts of Rome."

The Meeting "And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there" (16:13). Since there were too few Jews in a city to form a Synagogue (Barclay; Marshall), the Jews who were there met for prayer, usually by a body of water, which could be used for purification rituals (Alexander; Rackham; Bruce). Paul and those with him spoke to the women who had gathered for prayer. They gave them to the gospel (16:14).

Lydia "Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul" (16:14). Of all who were in the meeting, Luke focuses on Lydia. Lydia was a seller of purple. Alexander explains, "The purple color, so extravagantly valued by the ancients, included many shades or tints, from rose-red to sea-green or blue. Lydia's occupation may have been the sale of the dye itself procured from a shell-fish (*purpura murex*), but more so probably was that of cloth or clothes dyed with it, an art expressly mentioned in the classics as practiced by the Lydian women. She seems to have been temporarily residing at Philippi for this purpose, as Luke would scarcely have named Thyatira merely as her birthplace if it was not still her home."

Bruce adds that the purple dye was extracted from the madder root and was used for dying carpets until the end of the 19th century when a chemical dye superseded it. He also says there is inscriptional evidence of the existence of a guild of purple merchants in Philippi. Barclay, however, says, “The purple dye had to be gathered drop by drop from a certain shellfish and was so costly that to dye a pound of wool with it would take the equivalent of £150 in our money” (written in 1953).

Lydia was a worshipper of God, that is, she was a Gentile, a God-fearer (Rackham; Bruce). Evidently, she was a wealthy widow (Rackham). Apparently, they all spoke, but Lydia listened with keen interest to Paul (Rackham). As Paul spoke, the Lord opened Lydia’s heart (Lk. 24:45). Lydia trusted the Lord (16:15; see 8:37 NKJV). Bruce says the Lord opened her heart and she believed (2 Cor. 4:4). The fact that the Lord opened her heart does not in any way remove her responsibility to believe (Marshall). Just because the Lord opened her heart does not mean she was passive (Wiersbe; see 2 Thess. 2:13-14).

“And when she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, ‘If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.’ So, she persuaded us” (16:15). Not only Lydia, but her whole household trusted the Lord (10:24, 27, 44; 16:31-33; 18:8). Lydia’s household could be a reference to her family and/or her assistants in her business (Alexander; Bruce; Marshall). Lydia, as well as those in her household, was baptized. Those who practice infant baptism claim that there were children in the household; therefore, this passage illustrates infant baptism. However, since infants are incapable of faith, no infants were baptized on this occasion. Alexander remarks that both reason in a circle from foregone conclusions.

Notice carefully: Paul spoke (16:13) and God worked (16:14). A wealthy lady became a generous lady.

The Gentle Girl

The Girl “Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling” (16:16). The expression “now it happened” implies that Paul and his company took up residence in the house of Lydia (16:15), perhaps, formed a church, and sometime later on their way to a prayer meeting, they encountered a slave girl. This demon-possessed slave girl was a source of profit for her masters because of her ability to tell fortunes by the aid of the spirit that possessed her (Alexander). She was a clairvoyant owned by spiritual pimps who sold her metaphysical powers (Hughes). The slave stands in stark contrast to the well-to-do Lydia (Rackham).

The Proclamation “This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, ‘These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation’” (16:17). As Paul, Luke (“us”), and the others were on their way to a prayer meeting, the slave girl pursued them crying they were of the servants of the Most High God proclaiming the way of salvation (Lk. 8:28). Rackham says the expression “Most High God” is found in inscriptions, the desire for salvation was widespread, and several of the gods were worshipped by the name “savior.” Salvation was eagerly sought by Gentiles as well as Jews (Bruce). It was also a common term for the Christian message (4:12; 13:26, 13:47; Marshall). For the expression “the way,” see comments on Acts 9:2.

The Exorcism “And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, ‘I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.’ And he came out that very hour” (16:18). Day after day for many days, the slave girl stalked them to the point that it

greatly annoyed Paul. The Greek word translated “annoyed” means “to be worn out, sorely troubled.” It is translated “greatly disturbed” in Acts 4:2 and “indignant” in Mark 14:4. Alexander says Paul was out of patience from the frequent repetition of the same annoyance. Paul, then, exorcised the demon.

Notice carefully: Paul spoke (16:18) and God worked (16:18). The out-of-control slave became a gentle girl.

The Grateful Jailer

The Accusation “But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged *them* into the marketplace to the authorities” (16:19). The masters of the slave girl were angry by the loss of future (“hope”) profits that they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them to the marketplace, where business was transacted, both commercial and judicial (Alexander). Their hearts were in their wallets (Hughes). Only two of the four were arrested. Timothy and Luke were not. Luke was a Gentile and Timothy was half Gentile (Bruce).

“And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, ‘These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe’” (16:20-21). The slaver owners “brought” Paul and Silas before the city officials, that is, they formally presented or arraigned them (Alexander). The two charges against Paul and Silas were public disturbance and advocating non-Roman customs (Marshall). They charged Paul and Silas with exceedingly troubling their city. The Greek word translated “exceedingly trouble” means “to throw into great trouble, agitate.” This Greek word, which only appears here in the New Testament, pictures driving out of the normal state by stirring up disturbance (Alexander).

The slaver owners also charged Paul and Silas of teaching customs that were unlawful. In other words, Paul and Silas were charged with disturbing the city by attempting to introduce a new religion (Alexander), an unlawful religion (Rackham). It was lawful for Jews to practice Judaism, but Paul’s converts were turning away from idols and, therefore, from the worship of Rome and Augustus (Rackham). Marshall says that, officially, Romans were not supposed to practice foreign cults, but the principle was flexible.

Whenever gospel preaching interferes with economics, opposition and persecution are sure to come. Richard Collier, the historian of the Salvation Army, says that from the very beginning, persecution was great. “Gangs frequently hurled mud and stones through the windows at the preaching and the crowd. The liquor dealers worked hard to get Booth kicked out of East London. The police were of no help; in fact, they often broke up outdoor meetings and accused Booth’s followers of being the cause of all the trouble... Beatings were not uncommon in 1889, at least 600 Salvation Army members were assaulted—some were killed, and many were maimed. Even children were not immune; ruffians threw lime in the eyes of a child of a Salvation Army member. Newspapers ridiculed Booth. PUNCH referred to him as ‘Field Marshall von Booths’” (Collier, quoted by Hughes).

The Arrest “Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded *them* to be beaten with rods” (16:22). The appeal to Roman prejudice was successful (Alexander). It excited the passions of the populous. The magistrates assumed the guilt of Paul and Silas (Marshall). Unable to resist the mob, the magistrates ordered that the offenders be beaten with rods. In the panic, it was useless to plead their Roman

citizenship (16:37; Rackham). They were stripped and beaten (1 Thess. 2:2; 2 Cor. 11:25; see Marshall; Wiersbe).

“And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw *them* into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely” (16:23). Jewish beatings included a limitation. The Roman practice did not. After the beating, Paul and Silas were thrown into jail with instructions to the jailer to make sure they were securely incarcerated. In Latin, the officials who punished Paul and Silas were called *lictors*, which is where the expression “getting your licks” comes from (Hughes).

“Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks” (16:24). In obedience, the jailer put the prisoners in the inner prison and put their feet in stocks. Their backs were reduced to a swollen mass of lacerated skin and dried blood (Hughes).

The Earthquake “But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them” (16:25). The emotional humiliation and the physical beating (2 Thess. 2:2), did not dampen their spiritual enthusiasm. At midnight, they were praying, singing, and being overheard by the other prisoners. Charles Haddon Spurgeon said, “Any fool can sing in the day. It is easy to sing when we can read the notes by daylight, but the skillful singer can sing when there is not a ray of light to read by.... Songs in the night come only from God; they are not in the power of men.”

“Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were loosed” (16:26). As Paul and Silas were singing, an earthquake opened all the doors, including the external entrance and the door to the “inner prison,” as well as the chains and stocks of all the prisoners. There was total liberation from all of the constraints (Alexander).

The Jailer “And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself” (16:27). The earthquake also awakened the jailer. One of his first concerns was the prison and the prisoners. When he saw that the prison doors were open, he concluded that the prisoners had fled. Realizing he would be subjected to Rome’s discipline, which could have included his own execution, he drew his sword with the intent of committing suicide. Under certain circumstances, the Romans considered self-destruction not only lawful but a duty and even a virtue (Alexander; Bruce).

Alexander explains the jailer’s predicament. He would be disgraced for sleeping on his post. The justification of a miracle would have made matters worse. Moreover, according to the rigorous requirements of Roman law and discipline, he considered himself liable to suffer in their stead. As Wiersbe explains, according to Roman law, “If a guard lost a prisoner, he was given the same punishment the prisoner would have received; so there must have been some in the prison who had committed capital crimes. The jailer would rather commit suicide than face shame and execution.”

“But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, ‘Do yourself no harm, for we are all here’” (16:28). Paul intervened, shouting that all the prisoners were still present and accounted for; none had escaped.

“Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas” (16:29). Calling for a light, the jailer ran into the inner prison and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. The jailer was before them powerless, terrified, and in awe.

“And he brought them out and said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’” (16:30). The jailer brought Paul and Silas out of prison and, addressing them with respect and courtesy (“sirs), he asked them what he had to do to be saved. “Saved” is not a reference to being delivered from the wrath of his superiors; the prisoners had not escaped (Alexander; Marshall). Rather, “saved” is a reference to deliverance from the judgment of God on sin. The jailer knew about salvation because that is what Paul and Silas had been preaching (Rackham). Even the Demon-possessed slave girl knew about salvation (16:17).

“So, they said, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household’” (16:31). Both Paul and Silas told the inquiring jailer he had to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ to be saved. The addition of the word “on” (ἐπι) indicates trust. They not only saved the man’s life; they pointed him to eternal life (Wiersbe). They added that everyone in the jailer’s household could be saved similarly. The jailer’s faith did not cover them (Marshall). No one is saved by proxy (Wiersbe).

This was Peter’s message to Cornelius (10:43). Alexander points out that saving faith and evangelical repentance are separable experiences mutually implying one another. Salvation is not doing something; it is trusting Someone.

“Bishop John Taylor Smith was the chaplain general of the British army during World War I. He asked candidates for chaplaincy, ‘Now I want you to show me how you would deal with a man. We will suppose that I am a soldier wounded on the battlefield of battle. I have three minutes to live and am afraid to die because I do not know Christ. Tell me, how may I be saved and die with the assurance that all is well.’ If the applicant began to beat about the bush and talk about the true church, ordinances, and so on, the good Bishop would say, ‘that will not do. I only have three minutes to live. Tell me what I must do.’ As long as Bishop Smith was a chaplain general, unless a candidate could answer that question, he could not become a chaplain in the Army” (Hughes).

“Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house” (16:32). The jailer took Paul and Silas to his home, where they preached the gospel to the jailer and all who were in his house.

“And he took them the same hour of the night and washed *their* stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized” (16:33). The jailer and all his family members trusted Christ. The jailer then washed the stripes of Paul and Silas and they baptized the jailer and his family. Chrysostom suggested that the washing was reciprocal. The jailer cleansed them and they baptized him. “He washed and was washed. He washed them from their stripes and he himself was washed from his sins” (Chrysostom; Bruce).

This passage cannot be used to argue for the baptism of infants (“household” in 16:31 and “baptized” in 16:33), because all who were baptized were able to hear the gospel preached (16:32) and believe (16:34).

“Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household” (16:34). After the baptismal service, which took place outside of the house (implying that it took more water than might have been in the house), the jailer took Paul and Silas back home and they all enjoyed a celebration meal. The result of believing, trusting in God (Alexander), was joy. The jailer’s house was probably above the prison (Alexander).

Notice carefully: Paul spoke (16:31-32) and God worked (16:31). The delivered jailer became a grateful jailer.

The Release

The Decision “And when it was day, the magistrates sent the officers, saying, ‘Let those men go’” (16:35). In the meantime, the magistrates had decided to discharge any charges against Paul and Silas. The magistrates sent messengers to the jailer, instructing him to free the prisoners. Marshall explains, “They no doubt regarded the beating and the night’s imprisonment as a sufficient exercise of their authority over the troublemakers; to have sent them on to a higher court for so trivial an offense would have been to make themselves a laughingstock.”

“So, the keeper of the prison reported these words to Paul, saying, ‘The magistrates have sent to let you go. Now therefore depart, and go in peace’” (16:36). The jailer gave the good news to Paul that the magistrate said they could go. The jailer suggested that they go in peace.

The Declaration “But Paul said to them, ‘They have beaten us openly, uncondemned Romans, and have thrown us into prison. And now do they put us out secretly? No indeed! Let them come themselves and get us out’” (16:37). Using a strong expression for being beaten (Alexander), as a Roman citizen, Paul objects to being released secretly because of what was done to them publicly. He insists the magistrates themselves come to release them. Insisting on an official apology may have served to some degree as a protection for the believers in Philippi (Bruce). For them to sneak out of town would have left the believers there under a cloud of suspicion (Wiersbe). Barclay says, “Paul was not standing on his dignity for his own sake, but for the sake of the Christians he was leaving behind in Philippi. He wanted it to be seen that they were not without influential friends.” Years later, the believers at Philippi had to endure persecution (Phil. 1:27-30).

The Determination “And the officers told these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Romans” (16:38). When the messengers told the magistrates that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, the magistrates were fearful of what might happen to them.

“Then they came and pleaded with them and brought them out, and asked them to depart from the city” (16:39). The magistrates pleaded with Paul and Silas to leave the city. Technically, Roman citizens who had not been convicted of a crime could not be expelled from a Roman city (Bruce).

The Departure “So they went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia; and when they had seen the brethren, they encouraged them and departed” (16:40). After their release from prison, Paul and Silas went to Lydia’s house, where they encouraged the brethren. Then, they departed from the city.

Summary: In Philippi, God worked as Paul and Silas spoke. God worked by “normal” means and supernatural means to bring people to Christ, but in every case, Paul spoke. God opened hearts and doors (14:27; Rev. 3:7-8).

God worked. He led Paul and Silas to Philippi (16:9). He opened Lydia’s heart (16:14). He worked in delivering the slave girl from evil spirits (16:18). He used an earthquake to free Paul and Silas and, as a result, won the jailer to Christ. So-called “normal” means were used to win Lydia. Paul spoke (Luke does not say that he preached). He used “supernatural” means to deliver the slave girl. He used a “natural” earthquake, as well as speaking to bring the jailer to Christ.

Barclay points out that in Philippi, an amazing cross-section of the population was won for Christ. Lydia came from the very top end of the social scale, being a purple merchant who was wealthy. The slave girl came from the bottom of the social scale. The Roman jailer was from the

middle class. The rich and the poor, the slave and the free, male and female, were all saved when Paul and the others gave them the gospel.

Shortly after he was converted, D. L. Moody was visiting a town in Illinois, where he met the wife of a judge who was not a believer. The wife of the judge begged Moody to speak to her husband. The inexperienced evangelist replied, "I'm afraid I can't talk to him. I am only an uneducated young Christian." She insisted. Finally, Moody went to see the judge. The conversation was short. Moody simply said, "I cannot reason with a man like you, for I have no learning. I can only tell you that you must believe on the Lord Jesus Christ to be saved. If you are ever converted, I want you to be sure to let me know." The judge replied, "Young man, if such an unlikely thing happened, you'd certainly hear about it." Within a year, the judge trusted Christ and wrote to Moody to tell him what had happened. God works—when we speak.

WHAT IS YOUR RESPONSE?

One Pastor asked another, “How many decisions did you have Sunday?” The answer was “300.” When asked how he managed to get 300 decisions, the Pastor said, “I had 300 present. Some decided for and some decided against what I had to say.” Every time we hear a message, we respond. The types of responses vary, but we all respond. Here is Paul’s experience with that fact-of-life.

The Riot at Thessalonica

The Journey “Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews” (17:1). Leaving Philippi, Paul and his party passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, apparently without stopping. They traveled 33 miles from Philippi to Amphipolis, 27 miles from Amphipolis to Apollonia and another 35 miles from Apollonia to Thessalonica, the capital of Macedonia (Barclay; Marshall). In other words, it was about 100 miles from Philippi to Thessalonica (Wiersbe; Hughes). They probably did not stop in Amphipolis or Apollonia because there was no synagogue there (Alexander). At Thessalonica, they found a thriving city of about 20,000, where there was a Jewish synagogue (Hughes).

The Message “Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures” (17:2). Once they arrived in Thessalonica, they continued Paul’s practice of attending the synagogue to proclaim the gospel (Lk. 4:16). Going to the synagogue allowed Paul to begin with the Jews and also afforded him the best means of access to inquiring Gentiles (Alexander).

The mention of three Sabbaths implies they only remained in Thessalonica for two or three weeks. It has been argued that the content of the two letters Paul wrote to the Thessalonians indicates a longer ministry (Rackham; Marshall; Wiersbe). While Paul was in Thessalonica, he labored as a tentmaker (1 Thess. 2:9; 2 Thess. 3:7-10). He received financial help from the church at Philippi twice (Phil. 4:15-16).

Paul reasoned with them from the Scripture (Marshall suggests Ps. 2; 16; 110; Isa. 53). The Greek word translated “reason” means “to converse with, discourse, discuss, argue.” It is the Greek word from which comes the English word “dialogue” (Hughes). In Acts, it is used repeatedly of Paul’s ministry (17:2, 17:17; 18:4, 18:19; 19:8-9; 20:9; 24:12; 24:25). Alexander says the primary meaning is dialogue, but it can refer to formal discourse. Rackham says this word, which makes its first appearance here, seems to mark a change of Paul’s method. According to him, it denotes discussion by means of question and answer, but here it is used in the more general sense of reasoning and arguing. He adds that in the synagogue, teaching was the method of instruction, but in the more critical atmosphere of the west, that was not sufficient.

So, Paul adopted the method of reasoning. Wiersbe says “reasoning” indicates that Paul dialogued with them through questions and answers.

“Explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ” (17:3). Paul explained and demonstrated that the Messiah must die and be raised from the dead (Lk. 9:22; 24:26, 44; 1 Cor. 15:3-4). The

Greek word translated “explaining” means “to open up completely” and is used figuratively of explaining (Lk. 44:45). The Greek word translated “demonstrating” means “to place beside, set before, to quote as evidence.” Paul compared Old Testament passages on the Messiah to what Jesus did. Alexander says the distinction between the two is that the first is the elucidation or solution of difficulties and the second is the authoritative proposition of things to be believed. The Greek word translated “preach” means “to proclaim, declare.”

Note Paul’s method involved dialogue (discussion, questions, and answers), explanation, the use of evidence, and simply saying the gospel. Paul made his message clear and simple. After hearing a sermon by George W. Truett, a college student remarked, “So that is George Truitt, is it? Huh, he did not use one word I couldn’t understand.” Simplicity is the difference between confusion and communication (Hughes).

Some Responded “And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas” (17:4). A number of people were persuaded of what Paul was preaching (20:4). Some of the Jews became convinced. A large number of Gentiles, including a significant number of leading women in town, sided with Paul and Silas. The leading women either belonged to the upper-class or were wives of leading men (Marshall). The “devout Greeks” were God-fearers (Rackham; Bruce). This gave Paul and Silas access to the Gentile population (Alexander).

Some Reacted “But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people” (17:5). Not everyone, however, was persuaded. Some of the Jews were jealous of the influence exerted by Paul and Silas (Alexander). They were envious of Paul’s success (Wiersbe). The jealous Jews rounded up evil men from the marketplace. *The King James Version* calls them “certain lewd fellows of the baser sort.” A. T. Robertson calls them “bums.” The jealous Jews also gathered a mob, which caused an uproar in the city. The mob marched to Jason’s house, seeking Paul and Silas. It has been suggested that “Jason” was the Greek name of a Jewish resident, perhaps corresponding to the Hebrew Joshua (Alexander; Rackham; Bruce; Marshall says we do not know whether he was a Jew or a Gentile.). Paul and Silas were staying in Jason’s home (17:7).

“But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, “These who have turned the world upside down have come here too” (17:6). For some unstated reason, Paul and Silas were not in Jason’s house. The mob dragged Jason and some of the believers to the city officials instead of before the assembly. The mob was crying that those who had turned the world upside down in other places had come to Thessalonica. The Greek word translated “upside-down” means “to stir up, excite, unsettle.” Alexander says it means to produce a state of insurrection or rebellion and, therefore, very nearly corresponds to the English word “revolutionize.” He goes on to say that it conveys social disturbance and disorganization and that upside down is not the meaning of the Greek word. News of the trouble in Philippi had reached Thessalonica (Marshall). Many preachers have remarked that it was sin that turned the wrong world side up and Christianity turns it right side up.

“Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king; Jesus” (17:7). The charge against Jason is that he was housing these rebels who were opposed to Caesar by saying there was another King, namely, Jesus. It is evident from the letters Paul wrote to the Thessalonians shortly after this incident that he taught them prophecy when he was there (2 Thess. 2:5). He no doubt preached the kingdom of God

(Rackham; Bruce), meaning that when Jesus returned, He would set up the kingdom. This was twisted to say that Paul was preaching to another king other than Caesar.

“And they troubled the crowd and the rulers of the city when they heard these things” (17:8). The false charges against Jason troubled the crowd and officials. The Greek word translated “troubled” means “to disturb, trouble, stir up,” primarily in a physical sense. It is used figuratively to trouble the mind.

“So, when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go” (17:9). When the city officials obtained a security bond (Alexander), a bail (Rackham), from Jason and the others, they let them go. Some suggest that the guarantee was that Paul would leave the city (see Alexander; Bruce; Marshall), which Paul called a device of Satan (1 Thess. 2:16; Wiersbe).

Barclay says, “T. R. Glover quoted with delight the saying of the child who remarked that the New Testament ended with *Revolutions*. When Christianity really goes into action, it must cause a revolution both in the life of the individual and in the life of society.”

The Riot at Berea

Paul Preached “Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews” (17:10). For their own safety, under cover of darkness, the believers sent Paul and Silas to the next town, Berea, which was forty miles away in another district of Macedonia (Rackham; Marshall; Wiersbe say it was 45 miles and Barclay says it was sixty). Paul and Silas arrived in Berea no sooner than they continued their practice of beginning at the synagogue. Paul preached in the synagogue (Acts 17:7). The Lord used the wrath of man (Jewish hostility) to move the Gospel forward (Hodges).

Some Responded “These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so” (17:11). The Jews in the synagogue in Berea were more “fair-minded” than those in Thessalonica. The Greek word translated “fair-minded” means to be “noble-minded.” In other words, they were more “open-minded” (Bruce). They were more impartial, just and devoted to the truth (Alexander). They received the Word, the gospel (Alexander), with “all readiness.” The Greek word translated “readiness” means “eagerness, willingness, readiness.” It carries the idea of rushing forward (A. T. Robertson; Hughes). They received Paul’s message with readiness instead of pride and prejudice (Rackham). They were eager; they could not wait to receive God’s message! They were eager to hear God’s message as preached by Paul, but they also wanted to search the Scripture for themselves. Moreover, they not only search the Scriptures, they search the Scriptures daily to see if what Paul and Silas were preaching was true. It is said that George Miller read the Bible over 200 times. No wonder he was such a man of faith (Hughes).

It has been said that the exchange of ideas in modern society is in a “dialogue of the deaf.” Some speak with a silver tongue; others hear with a golden ear (Hughes).

“Therefore, many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men” (17:12). As a result of searching the Scripture, many of the Jews believed and many of the Gentiles, including prominent women as well as men. The Greek word translated “prominent” means “wealthy, influential.” Since women are mentioned first, the female converts were probably more numerous and perhaps more distinguished (Alexander), more prominent in the new Christian group (Marshall).

Some Reacted “But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that Paul preached the word of God at Berea, they came there also and stirred up the crowds” (17:13). It did not take long for the

Jews at Thessalonica to hear that Paul was preaching the gospel at Berea. The Jews from Thessalonica came to Berea and like they had done before, they stirred up the crowd. Paul had experienced this before (14:19). The Greek word translated “stirred up” means “to agitate, shake, to unsettle, to stir up.” It was used of both physical and mental agitation (Alexander).

“Then immediately the brethren sent Paul away, to go to the sea; but both Silas and Timothy remained there” (17:14). As soon as the commotion began (Alexander), the believers sent Paul and an escort (see “those who conducted Paul” in 17:15) out of town. They got out of town “quickly and quietly” (Bruce). The believers sent them to go to, that is, “toward” (*epi*) the sea. Rackham thinks this means that Mount Olympus forced them to go toward the sea, that is, to the sea coast, before they joined the road to Berea. Silas and Timothy remained in Berea to minister to the new converts.

“So, those who conducted Paul brought him to Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him with all speed, they departed” (17:15). The escorted accompanied Paul all the way to Athens. After depositing Paul in Athens, the escort returned to Berea with the message that Silas and Timothy were to come to Paul as soon as possible. Marshall suggests that although Acts does not say so, they did rejoin Paul and were sent back to Macedonia, Silas to Philippi, and Timothy to Thessalonica. After that, they again rejoined Paul at Corinth.

On September 22, 1975, Sara Jane Moore attempted to assassinate President Gerald Ford. Moore was forty feet away from Ford when she raised a .38-caliber revolver during his visit to San Francisco. Oliver Sipple, a disabled former Marine who was standing next to her, pushed her arm, and the bullet flew over the president’s head. On December 31, 2007, the 77-year-old Moore was paroled from the Dublin federal prison, just east of San Francisco, after thirty-two years behind bars. A year before her release, Moore made an interesting statement in an interview with KGO-TV. She stated, “I have often said that I had put blinders on, and I was only listening to what I wanted to hear (*Houston Chronicle*, 1/1/08, p. A3).

Summary: When Paul preached the gospel in Thessalonica and Berea, some believed and some reacted to the point of running Paul out of town.

Some are not persuaded (17:5). Some who do not respond do nothing. Others stir up others. Rather than search the Scriptures, they have their minds made up and they want to make up the minds of others! Some are persuaded (17:4). They hear and believe. Some search the Scripture and are persuaded. They are often the ones who are eager to share.

Kent Hughes tells of a pastor who witnessed a waitress in a restaurant. She indicated that she had not trusted Christ and began to make excuses as to why she could not go to church, mainly because she had to work on Sundays. Since there were very few people in the restaurant, the pastor had an opportunity to present the gospel to her. Normally, he used a small booklet to do that, but when he reached in his pocket, he realized he didn’t have one. So he took out a napkin and wrote out the presentation of the gospel on it. Later, he dropped off a Bible for her to read.

Sometime later, he went back to the restaurant. Now, it was packed with people. Across the restaurant, the waitress saw him and came to tell him she was reading the Bible he gave her. In fact, she had sometimes read it all night long! She also trusted Christ. At that point, she pulled the napkin out of her pocket. There wasn’t much left. She said to the pastor, “Would you write that down for me again? I’ve shown it to so many people, my napkin is coming apart.”

TALKING TO INTELLECTUALS

Years ago, I learned that people who do not know Christ can be divided into several categories. Some accept our presuppositions, such as the Bible being the Word of God. Others do not. I call that second group intellectuals because they accept their intellect as their authority. Moses encountered the intellectuals of Egypt, Daniel, the intellectuals of Babylon, and Paul, the intellectuals of Greece. Should you use the Scripture with them? If not, what would you do? Where would you start?

The Reception in Athens

The Synagogue “Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols” (17:16). Believers from Berea had escorted Paul to Athens, which was in the province of Achaia (Rackham). Then, they returned to Berea, leaving Paul in Athens, waiting for Silas and Timothy to join him (17:14-15).

Athens was the intellectual capital of the ancient world (Rackham). In the past, it was the native city of Socrates (470-399 BC) and Plato and the adopted home of Aristotle, Epicurus, and Zeno (Bruce). Thus, it contained the Academy of Plato, the Lyceum of Aristotle, the Porch of Zeno, and the Garden of Epicurus (Rackham). It was “the greatest university town in the world” in Paul’s day” (Barclay). The “flower of Roman youth” attended the Athens schools (Alexander). In fact, the education of the Roman aristocrat was not considered complete without studying at Athens (Rackham). Rackham observes, “The religious eastern wanted something spiritual—food for their souls; the serious westerns wanted something practical—help and guidance in facing the practical difficulties of life.”

Athens was the artistic capital of the world. It had been the home of the world’s greatest artists, poets, writers, and orators. It possessed the masterpieces of the greatest sculptors and architects. Its streets and buildings were crowded with statues and works of art (Rackham). Athens was the religious capital of the world (Rackham). The artists had filled the streets and temples of Athens with images of the gods (Rackham).

While Paul waited, he saw the temples and idols that filled Athens. The Greek text rendered “given over to idols” means “full of idols.” Ancient authors described Athens as crowded with idols and containing more such objects than other cities or the rest of Greece (Alexander). Paul found himself “confronted with a veritable forest of idols” (Wycherley, cited by Marshall). “One wit jested that in Athens, it was easier to find a god than a man” (Wiersbe). Hughes says the population of Athens was 10,000, but there were 30,000 statues of gods. The sight stirred his soul. The Greek word translated “provoked” means “spur on, stimulate, to provoke, rouse to anger.” Alexander says here it means “set on edge” and that Paul felt grief, shame, wonder, and compassion.

“Therefore, he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the Gentile worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there” (17:17). As was his custom, Paul began with the synagogue, where he reasoned (see comments on 17:2) with Jews and Gentiles. Based on the use of the word “reasoned,” Alexander says Paul used the Socratic Method. Paul also reasoned daily in the marketplace. It was unusual for Paul to go directly to the pagans

(Marshall). The marketplace was an open space in the center of the city, which was the focus of civic life. Around it were the public buildings, including the temples, the senate, the town hall, the law courts, and shops. When business was over, the town square became the resort of the idle, the gossips, and the news mongers. Teachers set up in one of the porches and gathered around their disciples. Hundreds of years before, Socrates practiced his dialectic in the Athenian marketplace (Rackham). Paul spoke to people in the marketplace who “happened to be there.” These were chance encounters, not appointments. Alexander calls them “random intercourse.”

The Philosophers “Then certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him. And some said, ‘What does this babbling man want to say?’ Others said, ‘He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods,’ because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection” (17:18). In the marketplace, Paul encountered the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers.

Epicureans were followers of Epicurus (340–270 BC). They were called Philosophers of the Garden because they met in Epicurus’ garden. Epicurus acknowledged the existence of the gods but described them as indifferent to humans (practical atheism). He ascribed the creation of the world to chance. Death is extinction with no afterlife. He “taught that the highest good and greatest end of existence was serene enjoyment, which his followers interpreted as meaning pleasure, and often of the grossest kind” (Alexander). Actually, the ideal of the Epicureans was not so much pleasure as happiness, that is, freedom from the distractions of life, the chief ingredients of which were the enlightened pleasures of the mind and social relationships (Rackham). The Epicureans have been likened to the secular humanists of today.

Stoics were followers of their founder Zeno (ca. 340-265 BC). They were called the Philosophers of the Porch because Zeno taught in a porch adjoining the market. Stoics acknowledged a supreme God and a Providence governed by a fatal necessity. They acknowledged the supremacy of moral good (Alexander). They were pantheists, believing that everything is god. (Normal Giesler says that trying to understand this is like catching a bar of soap in a bathtub, pinning jello to the wall with scotch tape, or nailing an egg to a lamp post.) They taught virtue for its own sake and that the wise man is self-sufficient, rising above all the circumstances of life and the passions of humans (Rackham). The Stoics had been likened to the New Age movement of today.

In the words of Wiersbe, “The Epicureans said, ‘Enjoy life!’ and the Stoics said ‘Endure life!’ but it remained for Paul to explain how they could enter into life through faith in God’s risen Son.”

Some of the philosophers called Paul a “babbling man.” The Greek word translated “babbling man” means “seed-picker.” It was slang for an idler, who lived on scraps picked up in the marketplace, hence, “idle babbling man” (A-S). Alexander says it was an expression of contempt used by any person of low or worthless character. Idlers picked up scraps of knowledge from others and tried to win a reputation by parading their pickings without having digested them (Rackham). Marshall compares them to people today who would pick up a cigarette butt and smoke it. In other words, the philosophers looked on Paul as a “retailer of second-hand scraps of philosophy,” and they “used a term of disparaging Athenian slang to describe him” (Bruce).

Others concluded that Paul was a “proclaimer of foreign gods,” perhaps suggesting the idea of barbarous or even outlandish (Alexander).

Paul preached Jesus and the resurrection. Some commentators say the Athenians took Jesus and Anastasis (the Greek word for resurrection) to mean god and goddess (see Alexander; Rackham; Wiersbe), but it is more likely that it is a reference to the resurrection (Marshall).

“And they took him 90 and 90 and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, ‘May we know what this new doctrine is of which you speak?’” (17:19). Paul was taken to the Areopagus, a hill facing the Acropolis, where Mars was said to have been tried for murder and from which the highest court of Athens took its name (Alexander). He was taken to the court-house, but not before a court (Alexander; Marshall, however, thinks it was a legal trial).

“For you are bringing some strange things to our ears. Therefore, we want to know what these things mean” (17:20). Alexander thinks the wording suggests a comic or half-serious tone.

“For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing” (17:21). As Luke explains (“for”), both the Athenians and the visitors to the city spent their time in telling and hearing the latest news. Marshall says Luke’s tone is “distinctly sarcastic.”

The Acropolis dominates Athens. The Areopagus is a smaller hill nearby. The first time I stood on what is left of the Areopagus and read this passage, Paul’s message came alive (see the explanation of the “message,” which is next).

The Message

The Introduction “Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, “Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you” (17:22-23). Paul’s message to the Athenians is recorded in Acts 17:22-31. Paul made himself all things to all men. He spoke to the Greeks as a Greek, not as the Jew to the Greeks. He spoke to philosophers as a philosopher (Rackham). He spoke to the intellectuals on their own level.

Marshall says the speech begins with an introduction “designed to attract the attention of the audience” and a statement of the theme (17:22). According to Marshall, the body of the speech consists of three points: 1) God is lord of the world, who does not dwell in temples (17:24 ff.). 2) Man is God’s creation; man needs God (17:26 ff.). 3) God and man are related; therefore, idolatry is foolish (17:28 ff.). The speech ends with a conclusion, calling on men to abandon their ignorant ideas of God.

Wiersbe writes, “Paul’s message is a masterpiece of communication. He started where the people were by referring to their altar dedicated to an unknown god. Having aroused their interest, he then explained who that God was and what He is like. He concluded the message with a personal application that left each council member facing a moral decision, and some of them decided for Jesus Christ.” Wiersbe also says that the body of the speech consists of four basic truths about God: 1) The Greatness of God: He is Creator (17:24). 2) The Goodness of God: He is Provider (17:25). 3) The Government of God: He is Ruler (17:26-29). 4) The Grace of God: He is Saviour (17:30-31).

Instead of beginning with the Scripture, as he did in the synagogue, after an introduction, Paul started with creation. Next, he spoke of judgment, appealing to the conscience. Then, he introduced Christ’s resurrection. Nevertheless, as Bruce points out, “Like the biblical revelation itself, his argument begins with God the creator of all and it ends with God the judge of all.”

Paul began his speech before the group gathered at the Areopagus by telling them that they were very religious. The Greek word translated “religious” is a compound word made up of the two words “fear” and “deity.” It means “reverent to the deity, religious.” Although it could be used in a derogatory sense (“superstitious”), Paul is using it in the positive sense of “religious”

(see “for” in 17:22). Paul explains (“for”) that he perceives them to be religious because he saw an altar with the inscription “to the unknown god.” Then, he proceeds to tell them that he is going to proclaim to them the One they worship without knowing who He is.

Ancient authors wrote about “altars of gods both named and unknown” in Athens (Pausanias, ca. 150 AD). Christian authors reported the same thing (Tertullian and Jerome). Jerome asserted that Paul deliberately altered the wording from the plural “gods” to the singular “god” to suit his purpose (Marshall). Barclay explains: “Six hundred years before this, a terrible pestilence had fallen on the city, and nothing could halt it. A Cretan poet, Epimenides, had come forward with a plan. A flock of black and white sheep from the Areopagus was let loose throughout the city. Wherever each lay down, it was sacrificed to the nearest god; and if a sheep lay down near the shrine of no known god, it was sacrificed to ‘The Unknown God.’”

The Message The body of Paul’s message is recorded in Acts 17:24-28.

Paul’s first point is that since God made the world and is the Sovereign of the universe, He does not dwell in temples made with hands. “God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands” (17:24). The Areopagus stood on the small ridge below the Acropolis, which was filled with idols made with hands. The expression “made with hands” was used for man-made idols in contrast with the living God (Marshall; Lev. 26:1; Isa. 46:6). In Jewish history, God dwelt in the Tabernacle and later in the Temple, but that was only the scene of the special manifestation of His presence (Rackham). By declaring that God created the world, Paul is saying something that was contrary to the Epicurean theory of the universe. They taught that matter was eternal. They argued that “out of nothing, nothing can come.” The Stoics, however, would have agreed with Paul (Rackham).

“Nor is He worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things” (17:25). God not only does not dwell in temples made with hands, He is not worshiped with anything that comes from man’s hands. God does not need anything that comes from the hands of people. He gives life and all things to human beings. The idea that God is the Creator of the universe is opposed to the idea that there is no God or that everything is God.

Paul’s second point is that God also made humans. “And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings” (17:26). God made the human race from one blood (Adam and Eve). There is unity in the human family. Rackham claims that Paul’s statement here was a rebuke to Athenian pride. He explains that, like the Jews, the Greeks divided the world into two kinds of people—Greeks and Barbarians. In the opinion of the Greeks, the Barbarians were of no account. Again, the Stoics, however, would have agreed with Paul. Bruce agrees saying that the fact God created all humans from a common ancestor removes “all imagined justification for the belief that the Greeks were innately superior to barbarians.”

God determined the appointed times for the human race. Several different explanations have been given for the expression “appointed times.” Alexander believes it refers to “the dates of history, the turning point in the existence of nations.” Bruce says it refers to “the seasons of the year by whose sequence annual provision is made for the supply of food.” Acts 14:17 supports the later explanation.

God determined the boundaries of the nations. Does this refer to natural (Wesley) or national boundaries (Alford; Bruce; Marshall)? Regardless of the interpretation of this phrase, the point is plain, namely, that the goodness of God in “providing for the needs of mankind” (Marshall).

Here are the comments of various commentators. Calvin: “This world is governed by his hand,” and “it was appointed before in his counsel how long he would have the state of every people to continue, and within what bounds he would have them contained.” Alford: “God is the Creator, Preserver and now the Governor of all men” and God prescribed “to each nation its space to dwell in and its time of endurance” (see also Gloag, who echoes Alford). Clark: “The removal of the Jews from their own land shows that a people may forfeit their original inheritance, and thus the Canaanites have been supplanted by the Jews; the Jews by the Saracens; the Saracens by the Turks; the Greeks by the Romans; the Romans by the Goths and Vandals; and so of others.” A. T. Robertson: “Nations rise and fall, but it is not blind chance or hard fate. Thus, there is an interplay between God’s will and man’s activities, difficult as it is for us to see with our shortened vision.” Bruce: “He gave the whole human race the whole earth for a dwelling place, allotting appropriate living space in each nation.” *NIV Study Bible*: “He planned the exact times when nations should emerge and decline, places where they should live. He also planned the specific area to be occupied by each nation.”

Humans breathe 18 times a minute, 1,080 times an hour, and about 25,000 times a day. By 40, they have taken more than 365 million breaths. The lungs furnish the blood with oxygen and carry away carbon dioxide and water. A few moments without breathing and people lose consciousness. A minute or two longer without oxygen could prove fatal. Job says, “Who among all these does not know that the hand of the LORD has done this, in whose hand *is* the life of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind?” (Job 12:9-10). These 25,000 gifts per day are gifts from the Lord.

“so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us” (17:27). The purpose of God arranging place and time to providentially provide for the well-being of human beings is so that they would seek of the Lord (Bruce). The Greek word translated “grope” means “to feel about for, search after.”

“for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are also His offspring’” (17:28). God is not only “not very far from each one of us,” it is “in Him we live and move and have our being.” What does Paul mean when he says all “in Him” we live, move and have their very being? Alexander says the relationship between God and people is “not mere external nearness, but an intimate, essential one.” We are in “vital and union with him, and included in him as the source and sphere of our existence.” All of the expressions in the first part of this verse may be regarded as “substantially equivalent, a combination or exhaustive expression of the one great thought, that our being and activity wholly dependent on our intimate relation and proximity to God our maker.” Rackham explains, “The continued existence of our physical life, the exercise of our faculties, and—what is alone true being or life—our self-conscious existence with all of its intellectual and spiritual activity, all these so depend upon God that we can be said to be *in him*.” The Stoics, who were pantheists, would have agreed.

Paul supports his claim that human beings are from God and should be seeking Him by quoting two of their poets. Constable writes, “The Cretan poet Epimenides (c. 600 B.C.; cf. Titus 1:12) had written, ‘For in thee we live and move and have our being.’ The Cilician poet Aratus (c. 315-240 B.C.), and Cleanthes (331-233 B.C.) before him had written, ‘We are also his offspring’” (see also Bruce; Marshall). Rackham contends that with this quotation, “Paul defeats Stoicism in that one of their own indicated that pantheism is only half true.” God may be universally immanent in nature, but that does not mean He is identical with nature. As the giver

of life God is the Parent (“offspring”) of man. Marshall claims that Paul “takes over pagan Greek poems, expressive of Stoic philosophy, and applies them to God.”

Among other things, Paul is arguing that God is as different from the world as an artist is from his art and a playwright is from his play. The play is not the playwright.

The Conclusion “Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man’s devising” (17:29). Paul concludes (“therefore”) that since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think of Him in material terms (Marshall). Human beings are the offspring of God in that they were created in God’s image (Bruce). Since humans are God’s offspring, idolatry is forbidden (Marshall). Alexander observes that the relationship between God and man must be spiritual, not corporal.

“Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent” (17:30). In the past, God overlooked the ignorance concerning His nature of God (Alexander; Marshall), but now He commands all to repent, that is, change their minds about His nature. (Alexander says repentance here is “with special reference to the sin of idolatry,” but he does not restrict it to that.) God being patient with man’s ignorance of His nature does not mean people are not guilty (Rom. 1:19-20).

“because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead” (17:31). The reason why everyone everywhere should repent is that God has appointed a day to judge the world. The Man, Jesus Christ, will conduct the judgment, whom God demonstrated would be the judge by raising Him from the dead. Paul has come full circle back to the resurrection (17:18).

Barclay says, “Life is neither a progress to extinction, as it was to the Epicureans, nor a pathway to absorption to God, as it was to the Stoics; it is a journey to the judgment seat of God where Jesus Christ is Judge.” Alexander says, “The Apostle showed his wisdom, in addressing such an audience, by setting out from principles of natural religion, and gradually introducing the distinctive doctrines of the Gospel, as he begins to do in this verse. That he did not fully carry out his plan was the fault of his hearers, not his own.”

The Reaction

Some Mocked “And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, ‘We will hear you again on this matter’” (17:32). When some heard Paul speak about the resurrection of the dead, they mocked. The Greek word translated “mocked” means “to jest, mock, jeer” (see 2:13). Alexander says it means “derided, ridiculed.” He says, “The possibility of resurrection after death was not only no part of the Greek creed, either philosophical or popular but was positively repudiated as a gross absurdity.” As Aeschylus wrote, “Once dead, there is no resurrection.” Wiersbe says that the proud, sophisticated, wise Athenians did not take easily to Paul’s humbling message. “It is possible to make a jest of life; but those who do so will find that what began as comedy must end in tragedy” (Barclay). Bruce points out that, except for the Epicureans, all of them would have agreed with Paul had he spoken about the immortality of the soul. The idea of the resurrection was ridiculed because to them, that was absurd (see also Marshall).

Some said, “More later.” Although some say that the statement “We will hear you again on this matter” is “a polite refusal,” it was a serious proposal that was never executed (Alexander).

Barclay concludes, “It would seem on the whole that Paul had less success in Athens than anywhere else. It was typical of the Athenians that all they wanted was to talk. They did not want action; they did not even particularly want conclusions. They wanted simply mental acrobatics and the stimulus of a mental hike.” He adds, “The most dangerous of all days is when a man discovers how easy it is to talk about tomorrow.”

“So, Paul departed from among them” (17:33). Paul’s message was rejected by some, derided by others, and put off to a more convenient season by still others. At any rate, Paul left.

Some Believed “However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them” (17:34). Alexander suggests that had the story of Paul’s ministry at Athens ended with the previous verse, it would have seemed to be entirely fruitless. To correct that impression, Luke adds that some believed. Dionysius was a member of the Areopagite.

Eusebius reports that according to Dionysius (Bishop of Corinth ca. 170 AD), Dionysius the Areopagite was the first bishop of Athens (Bruce) and Nicephorus says he suffered martyrdom there (Alexander). Although some say Damaris was the wife of Dionysius (Chrysostom), it is more likely that she was the only female convert. Hence, the most distinguished male and the only female convert are mentioned (Alexander).

As Wiersbe says, some receive the Word. Some resist the Word. Some ridicule the Word. Some are too wise to know their own ignorance. God gives people up to that ignorance (Rom. 1:21-23; Hodges). It is doubtful that a church was founded at Athens. Paul describes the Corinthian converts as the “first fruits of Achaia” (1 Cor. 16:15; Marshall).

Summary: The way to present the Gospel to intellectuals is to begin with God as Creator and move toward the person of Christ. God is the Creator and Judge of mankind and wants to be the Savior of mankind.

Paul’s speech is a model for approaching “cultured pagans” (Bruce; Marshall uses the same expression.). Marshall says it is an illustration of Paul’s approach to educated pagans.

Reason with them (17:17). In the synagogue, Paul used Scripture. With the intellectuals, he used reason.

Remind them that God is the Creator. The Declaration of Independence begins with this truth, which it calls self-evident! “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.” That statement declares four truths. There is a Creator. God created human beings (a supernatural act). Humans are created equal. Humans have God-given rights.

Remember, some will mock. Some will call you a birdbrain, but some will believe.

Do not be afraid to talk to so-called “intellectuals.” Over the years, I’ve talked with a handful of people who said at the beginning of the conversation that they were atheists. I began by arguing for the existence of God from creation and, on several occasions, have led some of them to Christ.

Anthony Flew, the British scholar, abandoned atheism because he said the scientific evidence does not support it!

ENCOURAGEMENT

Last week, a fellow person talked to me about being discouraged. He has been laid off and is drawing unemployment. In the meantime, he is diligently looking for a job—without success. Have you ever been discouraged? Nothing is going right. You have one obstacle after another you have to face. Then you get physically tired, mentally drained, and emotionally spent. What do you do then? Believe it or not, the apostle Paul had one discouraging experience after another. Let's look at what happened to him and how he dealt with it. What would it take to encourage the apostle Paul? What would it take to encourage you when you are discouraged?

Do Not Withdraw

Paul was Alone “After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth” (18:1). Paul departed from Athens. The Greek word translated “departed” means “to separate, divide, put asunder, depart.” It is used of divorce (Mt. 19:6; Mk. 10:9; 1 Cor. 7:10, 11, 15). Alexander says that this may imply that Paul left Athens with reluctance and regret.

Paul traveled fifty miles to Corinth, the capital of Achaia (Alexander). Rackham says that going from Athens to Corinth was like going from Oxford to London. He adds that Corinth was a flourishing commercial city and perhaps the largest city Paul had yet visited, with the exception of Syrian Antioch. It had 200,000 people (Wiersbe). Corinth stood at the foot of a hill eighteen hundred feet high. On top of that hill was the Corinthian Acropolis, with a pagan temple dedicated to the goddess Aphrodite. Within the temple, there were 1000 prostitutes. The city of Corinth had a reputation for immorality, which is amply reflected in 1 Corinthians (Marshall). The morals of Corinth were such that the very name “Corinthian” became synonymous with practicing fornication (Bruce). Paul wrote Romans 1:18-32 from Corinth!

At this point in his life, Paul needed some encouragement. At Philippi, he had been beaten and run out of town. At Thessalonica, he was rejected and ran out of town again. When he went to Berea, the people at Thessalonica followed him. His next stop was Athens, which was not exactly an overwhelming success. Although there were some conversions in Athens, Paul was apparently unable to establish a church there. Basically, he was met with indifference. Now, the apostle Paul is in Corinth—alone. Earlier on this missionary trip, Paul left Silas and Timothy to care for the churches they had started. Paul arrived in Corinth needing “spiritual encouragement” (Marshall). When we get discouraged, we tend to withdraw from people.

Paul Found Friends “And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome) and he came to them” (18:2). At Corinth, Paul met Aquila, a native of Pontus, a northern province of Asia Minor (1 Pet. 1:1). Aquila and his wife Priscilla were residents of Rome when Claudius commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome. The Greek word rendered “depart” in this verse is the same one that appears in verse 1. Suetonius says that Claudius expelled the Jews because they were continually making a disturbance (Alexander). Paul's coming to them seems to imply that they were believers (Alexander). Aquila and Priscilla became Paul's lifelong friends (Bruce). They were with him in Ephesus and later labored in the church in Rome. In some references to Aquila and Priscilla, she is named first (18:18; Rom;

16:3; 2 Tim. 4:19). One theory is that she was a Roman lady of higher rank than Aquila, but she probably took the leading part in evangelistic work (Rackham). “She was the more important figure from a Christian point of view” (Marshall).

“So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers” (18:3). All Jewish boys were taught a trade. “He who does not teach his son to work, teaches him to steal!” said the rabbis (Wiersbe). Since Rabbis were expected to perform their duties without demanding a fee, it was necessary for them to have some other source of income (Marshall). The Jews said, “Excellent is the study of the law along with a worldly trade; for the practice of them both makes a man forget iniquity, but all Law without work must, in the end, fail and causes iniquity” (Barclay).

Paul’s trade was tent-making, by which he supported himself (1 Cor. 9:6-15; 2 Cor. 11:6-10). Aquila was also a tentmaker. The Greek word translated tentmakers means “makers of tents,” but some say it should be taken in the more general sense of leatherworkers (Bruce). In Paul’s day, tents were in great demand by soldiers and travelers (Alexander). Paul and Aquila worked together in the same trade and in the work of the Lord. Wiersbe observes that Aquila and Priscilla are examples of how “lay ministers” help further the work of the Lord. He adds, “Humanly speaking, there would have been no church in Corinth were it not for the devotion and service of many different people.”

Surly, Paul shared with Aquila and Priscilla. When you are discouraged, do not withdraw. Connect with people and do something.

“My mother used to ask me what the most important part of the body is. Through the years, I would take a guess at what I thought was the correct answer. When I was younger, I thought sound was very important to us as humans, so I said, ‘My ears.’ She said, ‘No. Many people are deaf. But you keep thinking about it and I will ask you again soon.’ Several years passed before she asked me again. Since making my first attempt, I have contemplated the correct answer. So this time, I told her, ‘Mommy, sight is very important to everybody, so it must be our eyes’. She looked at me and told me, ‘You are learning fast, but that answer is incorrect because many people are blind’. Stumped again, I continued my quest for knowledge and, over the years, my mother asked me a couple more times and always her answer was, ‘No. But you are getting smarter every year, my child.’

“Then, last year, my grandpa died. Everybody was hurt. Everybody was crying. Even my father cried. I remember that, especially because it was only the second time I saw him cry. My mom looked at me when it was our turn to say our final goodbye to Grandpa. She asked me, ‘Do you know the most important body part yet, my dear?’ I was shocked when she asked me this now. I always thought this was a game between her and me. She saw the confusion on my face and told me, ‘This question is very important. It shows that you have really lived in your life. For every body part you gave me in the past, I have told you it was wrong and given you an example why. But today is the day you need to learn this important lesson.’ She looked down at me as only a mother can. I saw her eyes well up with tears. She said, ‘My dear, the most important body part is your shoulder.’ I asked, ‘Is it because it holds up your head?’ She replied, ‘No, it is because it can hold the head of a friend or a loved one when they cry. Everybody needs a shoulder to cry on sometime in life, my dear. I only hope you have enough love and friends to always have a shoulder to cry on when you need it.’ Then and there, I knew the most important body part is not selfish. It is sympathetic to the pain of others. People will forget what you said. People will forget what you did. But people will NEVER forget how you made them feel” (author unknown).

Do Not Quiet

Opportunity “And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks” (18:4). Paul did not quiet. He continued to be engaged in ministry. As was his custom, Paul began his ministry in Corinth by going to the synagogue to reason (see comments on 17:2) with the Jews and the Gentiles who were there to persuade them that Jesus was the Messiah. The remains of an inscription over the door of a Jewish synagogue dating from this period has been found in Corinth (Marshall).

“When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews *that Jesus is the Christ*” (18:5). When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, they found Paul being constrained to testify to the Jews (Alexander). This is the last mention of Silas in Acts. The Greek word translated “compelled” means “to hem in, press on every side, constrain.” The Greek text has no article in the phrase “by the spirit.” In other words, the Greek text reads, “in spirit” (see “in the spirit,” small “s” in the KJV). Observing this construction, Rackham says Paul felt the pressure on his spirit, either from without or from within. The Word was pressing against the walls of his heart. Rackham also notes that instead of reasoning, Paul testified.

From Corinth, Paul wrote to the church at Thessalonica. “Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone, and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this. For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know. For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain. But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us, as we also *to see* you; therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith. For now, we live, if you stand fast in the Lord” (1 Thess. 3:1-8). Notice that Paul sent Timothy to *encourage* them (1 Thess. 3:2) and the report about them was a *comfort* to Paul (1 Thess. 3:7). The Greek word translated “encourage” in verse 2 is the same one that is rendered “comfort” in verse 7.

Moreover, when Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, they brought money with them to support Paul in his ministry (Marshall), enabling him to devote full time to preaching the gospel (Wiersbe). Later, when Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he said, “And when I was present with you, and in need, I was a burden to no one, for what I lacked the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied” (2 Cor. 11:9).

Paul was encouraged by the arrival of his fellow workers, who brought encouraging news and support (Marshall).

Opposition “But when they opposed him and blasphemed, he shook *his* garments and said to them, ‘Your blood *be* upon your *own* heads; I *am* clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles’” (18:6). What happened next was similar to what happened at Antioch in Pisidia (13:45-47). Again, Paul encountered opposition. Frances Bacon said, “Prosperity is the blessing of the Old Testament. Adversity is the blessing of the New” (Bacon, cited by Wiersbe). Wiersbe says, “Whenever God is blessing a ministry, you can expect increased opposition as well as increased opportunities. ‘For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries’ (1 Cor. 16:9). After all, the enemy gets angry when we invade his territory and liberate his

slaves. As in Thessalonica and Berea (17:5-13), the unbelieving Jews who rejected the Word stirred up trouble for Paul and his friends (see 1 Thess. 2:14-16.). Such opposition is usually proof that God is at work, and this ought to encourage us. Spurgeon used to say that the devil never kicks a dead horse!”

Paul shook the dust from his cloak so that not a speck of dust from the synagogue might adhere to it (Bruce). Shaking the dust off was what the Jews did to the Gentiles. By doing this to the Jews, Paul was saying that those who reject the gospel are no better than the Gentiles (Marshall). “Today, we might say we were washing our hands of a situation” (Wiersbe).

To have blood on your hands was an idiom for bearing the responsibility for another’s death (Wiersbe). Paul says he is not responsible for what they did with the message (Marshall).

Outcome “And he departed from there and entered the house of a certain *man* named Justus, *one* who worshiped God, whose house was next door to the synagogue” (18:7). As a result of the opposition, Paul left the synagogue and began meeting with people in the home of Justus, a Gentile God-fearer (Rackham), who lived next door to the synagogue (Alexander). He was undoubtedly one of Paul’s converts (Marshall). W. A. Ramsay and E. J. Goodspeed claimed that Justin was Gaius, the same man named by Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:14 (see also Rom. 16:23). Bruce says there is much to be said for this conclusion. Marshall says that although it cannot be proven, it is “a very reasonable conjecture.”

“Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized” (18:8). The other outcome was Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, as well as the members of his family, believed on the Lord. In fact, many of the Corinthians, hearing the gospel, believed, and were baptized (9:42; 11:17; 14:23; 16:31). Paul says he baptized Crispus (1 Cor. 1:14).

Paul had some success, but there was still danger. Rackham suggests that his life was in danger. When he wrote to the Thessalonians from Corinth, he requested, “Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run *swiftly* and be glorified, just as *it is* with you, and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for not all have faith” (2 Thess. 3:1-2).

By refusing to quiet, Paul was encouraged with some success. Some great inventions got off to a slow start. The first electric light was so dim that a candle was needed to see its socket. One of the first steamboats took 32 hours to chug its way from New York to Albany, a distance of 150 miles. Wilbur and Orville Wright’s first airplane flight lasted only 12 seconds. And the first automobiles traveled only 2 to 4 miles per hour and broke down often. Carriages would pass them with their passengers shouting, “Get a horse!” Dr. V. Raymond Erdman used to say to the Wheaton (Illinois) College students, “It’s always too soon to quit.”

Don’t Fear

Fear “Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, “Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent” (18:9). Concerning his experience in Corinth, Paul wrote, “And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling” (1 Cor. 2:1-3). Paul was waiting for the next shoe to drop.

Today if you visit Thomas Carlyle’s famous home in London, they will show you an almost soundproof chamber that Carlyle had built so the noise of the street could be shut out and he could work in silence. One of his neighbors, however, kept a rooster that, several times in the

night and in the early morning, gave way to vigorous self-expression. When Carlyle protested to the owner of the rooster, the man pointed out that the rooster crowed only three times in the night and that, after all, could not be such a terrible annoyance. "But," Carlyle said to him, "If you only knew what I suffer waiting for that rooster to crow!"

The Vision Jesus, here called the Lord (Alexander; Marshall), spoke to Paul in a vision, telling him not to fear but to keep speaking. Marshall says, "It is significant that the message is couched in the language used by God Himself in the Old Testament when addressing his servants (Stahlin, p. 245, compares 7:9; Ex. 3:12; Dt. 31:6; Jos. 1:5,9; Is. 41:10; 43:5; Je. 1:8). The New Testament assigns to Jesus a function and status equal to those of God the Father himself. The formula 'Do not be afraid' is regularly used in Old Testament theophanies to calm the fears of the recipient of the vision of being addressed by God. Here, however, the words are directed rather at Paul's fears concerning his own position against his opponents in Corinth. Instead of fearing what they may do to him, Paul is to proclaim the Word fearlessly. The Greek tenses used may suggest that Paul is to go on preaching as he has already been doing."

"for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city" (18:10). The reason the Lord wanted Paul to keep preaching the gospel in Corinth is twofold. In the first place, the Lord will be with him to aid and protect him (Alexander) and, secondly, because the Lord has many in the city who will believe (Alexander). The statement "I have many people in this city" implies the doctrine of election (Wiersbe). Marshall says, "The command is backed up by the promise that the Lord will be with Paul (Is. 43:5). This type of promise was a form of assurance to those called by God to serve him that they would be able to fulfill his command (Jdg. 6:12; Ru. 2:14; Lk. 1:28). As a result of God's protection of Paul, nobody would be able to lay hands on him and harm him." He adds that the expression "I have many people in this city" indicates "divine foreknowledge of the success of the gospel in Corinth (cf. 13:48). Fortified by this message, Paul could look forward to its double fulfillment in his safekeeping from persecution (18:12-17) and in his successful evangelism (18:11)."

God will not allow more to happen to you than you can bear with His grace.

The Visit "And he continued *there* a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them" (18:11). Paul continued his visit to Corinth for eighteen months. This is Paul's longest recorded visit to date. The last period of time mentioned for Paul staying in one place was the year he spent in Antioch (11:26). It has been suggested that Paul made Corinth his headquarters (Rackham).

During this time, Paul engaged in teaching believers. Rackham says, "Instead of having to seek out new converts and proclaim the gospel abroad, his main occupation was rather to *teach* or instruct the great number of somewhat undisciplined and unruly Corinthians who were flooding into the church." He adds, "The number of converts was very large and they received the word with extraordinary enthusiasm. There was a great display, or outburst, of spiritual gifts, prophecy, and speaking with tongues. The church was an organism whose intense vitality found expression in a variety of highly diversified ministries: there were apostles, prophets, teachers, miracle-workers, healers, helps, 'governments,' speakers of tongues."

As the Lord promised (18:10), Paul successfully continued his ministry.

The Charge "When Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him to the judgment seat" (18:12). Gallio is the first and almost the only reference to secular chronology in the book of Acts (Rackham). An inscription from Delphi, Greece, containing the twenty-sixth acclamation of Claudius as emperor (the twenty-sixth time Claudius named himself emperor), mentions that Gallio was "proconsul of Achaia." Dating

from the twenty-sixth acclamation of Claudius, the inscription is placed between January and August of AD 52. Since Gallio had to have been in office long enough to have made a report and received this commendation, he probably took office in the spring or summer of AD 51. Thus, Paul appeared before Gallio in AD 51 or 52 (possibly later). Hoehner concludes that Paul left Antioch on his second missionary journey (Acts 15:36-18:22) in April AD 50 and he was in Corinth from March AD 51 to September AD 52 (Bruce says Paul was in Corinth from the fall of AD 50 to the spring of AD 52. Marshall says that Gallio probably commenced his proconsulship in July of AD 51).

Gallio was the brother of Seneca, the Stoic, and Nero's tutor. Because Gallio had such an amiable character, Statius called him "sweet Gallio." (Rackham), but he suffered from ill-health (Marshall). In 65 AD, he "fell victim to Nero's suspicions" (Bruce).

The Jews could not stop Paul by having him expelled from the synagogue (18:4-7), so they charged him before a civil court. The expression "with one accord" implies a joint action and a systematic plan (Alexander). A similar charge was brought against Paul at Philippi (16:21). The judgment seat was a stone platform in the agora that can be seen there until this day (Marshall).

Paul was safe and successful, but that does not mean he did not have opposition. The Lord being with us (18:10) does not mean we will be without trouble! As Bruce says, "Paul received a divine promise that no harm would befall him through any attack in Corinth, but he was not promised that no attack would be made."

"saying, 'This fellow persuades men to worship God contrary to the law'" (18:13). The charge of the Jews against Paul was that he persuaded people to worship contrary to their law (18:15; Alexander). Gallio was the brother of Seneca, the famous Stoic (Alexander).

The Dismissal "And when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, 'If it were a matter of wrongdoing or wicked crimes, O Jews, there would be reason why I should bear with you, but if it is a question of words and names and your own law, look to it yourselves; for I do not want to be a judge of such matters'" (18:14-15). Before Paul could speak to defend himself, Gallio told the Jews that if Paul were charged with a crime, he would hear the case, but since this was a matter of Paul breaking their laws, they should deal with it. Rackham says that "wrongdoing" is "injury done to others" and "wicked crimes" are practices that were "a public scandal or cause damage to the state by their violation of the elementary law of morality." Paul had not been charged with a recognizable crime or misdemeanor (Bruce). It was not a crime against the state (Marshall).

"And he drove them from the judgment seat" (18:16). Gallio kicked them all out of court!

The Beating "Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. But Gallio took no notice of these things" (18:17). When Gallio dismissed the Jews, the citizens of Corinth "expressed their indignation or perhaps gave vent to their long-cherished hatred of the Jews, by beating their official representatives" (Alexander). This is a "flagrant display of anti-Semitism" (Wiersbe). It has been suggested that Sosthenes succeeded Crispus as ruler of the synagogue (Rackham; Bruce). Gallio ignored the whole affair.

First Corinthians begins with the words, "Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, to the church of God which is at Corinth" (1 Cor. 1:1-2a). Is the Sosthenes of Acts 18:17 the same as the one mentioned in Corinthians 1:1? The only support for such a conclusion is the identity of the name (Alexander).

Bruce makes the interesting observation that Galileo's ruling probably served as a precedent for other Roman judges. For the next 10 or 12 years, until Nero's action against the Christians of Rome in 64 AD, the gospel could be proclaimed without fear of coming into conflict with

Roman law. The next charge brought against Paul before a Roman judge pertained to him of personally. Wiersbe points out that in Philippi (16:35-40), Corinth (18:14-15), and Ephesus (19:31), the Roman officials were “not only tolerant but almost cooperative.”

When Lincoln was on his way to Washington to be inaugurated, he spent some time in New York with Horace Greeley and told him an anecdote that was meant to be an answer to the question that everybody was asking him: Are we really going to have a Civil War? In his circuit-riding days, Lincoln and his companions, riding to the next session of court, had crossed many swollen rivers. But the Fox River was still ahead of them, and they said one to another, “If these streams give us so much trouble, how shall we get over the Fox River?” When darkness fell, they stopped for the night at a log tavern, where they fell in with the Methodist presiding elder of the district who rode through the country in all kinds of weather and knew all about the Fox River. They gathered about him and asked him about the river’s present state. “Oh yes,” replied the circuit rider, “I know all about the Fox River. I have crossed it often and understand it well. But I have one fixed rule with regard to the Fox River—I never cross it till I reach it.”

Summary: Even though when he got to Corinth, Paul was discouraged, he did not withdraw from people, nor did he not quiet, but instead he continued to do what God wanted him to do and the Lord protected him and gave him success.

When Paul was discouraged, he encountered even more discouraging circumstances, but he was encouraged by fellow believers and by the Lord. In contrast to Athens, Paul was more successful in Corinth. “Where God has many people, His servants have much success” (Hodges). Charles Spurgeon reminded his London congregation, “By perseverance, the snail reached the ark.”

Pastor Mark Coleman loves to hike, and he passed on that love to his son, Peter. When Peter was only 5 years old, Coleman planned an easy hike on the northern part of the Appalachian Trail. Coleman would lead him around a mountain to a lake in Vermont, where they would spend the night. He made thorough preparations for the trip, including coaching his son. Over and over, he told him that it would be tough, and that it was okay to be tired, but they had to keep on walking. Unfortunately, the walking was longer and tougher than expected because Coleman led them over the mountain, not around it. The trail was steep and broken. Little Peter stumbled time after time on loose rocks, but they kept on walking. The hike was a burden, not a joy, but they kept on walking. Peter fell so many times that he ripped the knees of his jeans, but he kept on walking. Finally, after one fall too many, he sat and cried. As Mark approached him and began to speak, Peter cut him off: “I know, Dad. It’s okay to cry, as long as I keep on walking” [From a sermon by Mark Coleman (3-16-03); submitted by Jeffrey Arthurs, South Hamilton, Massachusetts]

THE NEED FOR MORE INSTRUCTION

Jay Leno, the host of the *Tonight Show*, periodically went “jaywalking.” He and his film crew hit the street to ask people questions about one thing or another to see how much they knew. In one of these episodes, he asked people about the Bible. For example, he asked people to name one of the Ten Commandments. One answer he got was, “God helps those who help themselves.” He asked another person to name one of the apostles. When the person could not do that, Leno asked him to name the four Beatles. Without hesitation, the fellow said, “George, Paul, John, and Ringo.” When he asked, “Can you tell me, according to the Bible, who a great fish swallowed?” the answer was “Pinocchio.” When he asked, “How was Eve created?” the answer he received was “from an apple.”

College-bound junior and senior high school students in Newton, Massachusetts, were surveyed for a Bible as literature class. Some thought Sodom and Gomorrah were lovers, Jezebel was Ahab’s donkey, the four horsemen appeared on the Acropolis, and Matthew, Mark, Luther, and John wrote the New Testament gospels. One answer to the question “What was Golgotha?” was given by a senior who graduated in the top 5 percent of his class. He said: “Golgotha was the name of the giant who slew the apostle, David.”

It seems that some need some instruction concerning the Scripture. Who? What do they need to know? A passage in Acts answers these questions. Acts 18:18-28 records some of the events in the ministry of Paul and Apollos.

Paul Made a Vow

At Cenchrea “So Paul still remained a good while. Then he took leave of the brethren and sailed for Syria, and Priscilla and Aquila *were* with him. He had *his* hair cut off at Cenchrea, for he had taken a vow” (18:18). After Paul stayed in Corinth a good while, he departed for Antioch in Syria. While at Corinth, he had already planned to eventually go to Rome (Rom. 1:13). At this point, Paul took Priscilla and Aquila with him to Ephesus.

Cenchrea, one of the two seaports of Corinth, was on the east side of the isthmus. There was a church there (Rom. 16:1). At Cenchrea, somebody got a haircut. The question is, “Who?” The answer to that question has been disputed since Chrysostom and Jerome. One possibility is that it was Aquila. Aquila is not only the nearest antecedent, but his name appears after Priscilla as if to bring him closer to the following verb. The problem with that argument is that the names occur in the same order elsewhere (Rom. 16:3; 2 Tim. 4, 19). Furthermore, there is a series of participles, all relating to Paul, unless that is an exception. Alexander concludes, “There is no sufficient reason for mentioning a circumstance so unimportant in relation to a minor personage like Aquila.” The other possibility, of course, is Paul.

Paul Made a Vow Did Paul take a Nazirite vow? According to the Mosaic Law, the Nazirite vow was an act of separation to the Lord (Num. 6:1-21). Those taking the vow abstained from strong drink and allowed their hair to grow for a specific time, at the close of which they shaved their heads and offered certain sacrifices. Some commentators conclude that Paul took a Nazirite vow, which may explain why he immediately left Ephesus. He had to get to Jerusalem to fulfill the vow (Rackham; Barclay; Wiersbe; *The Ryrie Study Bible*; *The NKJV Study Bible*). Others

contend that Paul did not take a Nazirite vow. The Nazirite vow could only be performed at the Temple, or at least in Palestine. The Nazirite vow required letting the hair grow during a specific period and shaving the head at the end. Paul got his hair cut. Therefore, Paul did not take a Nazirite vow.

Paul's vow was a personal vow (Alexander, who says see Gen. 28:20; Lev. 27:2; Num. 30:2; Deut. 23:21; Judges 11:30; 1 Sam. 1:11; 2 Sam. 15:7; Ps. 65:1; Eccl. 5:4). Bruce says it was a private vow, which was an act of thanksgiving, probably for the divine favor mentioned in Acts 18:10 (see also Marshall). Perhaps it was something like giving an extra offering to the Lord out of gratitude for His blessing.

J. Vernon McGee says, "There are a great many folks who find fault with Paul because he made a vow. They say that this is the man who preached that we are not under law, but we are under grace, and so he should not have made a vow. Anyone who says this about Paul is actually making a little law for Paul. Such folks are saying that Paul is to do things their way. Under grace, friend, if you want to make a vow, you can make it. And if you do not want to make a vow, you don't have to. Paul didn't force anyone else to make a vow. In fact, he said emphatically that no one has to do that. But if Paul wants to make a vow, that is his business. That is the marvelous freedom that we have in the grace of God today."

Paul Reasoned with the Jews

At Ephesus "And he came to Ephesus, and left them there; but he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews" (18:19). Previously, Paul had been prevented from preaching in Asia (16:6). Now he visits Ephesus, its capital (Rackham).

Paul Reasoned with the Jews At Ephesus, Paul reasoned with the Jews in the synagogue (see comments on 17:2). When he continued his journey, he left Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus (see comments on 18:2). Paul preached the gospel in the synagogue in Ephesus. Unbelievers need more instruction. These were religious people who knew the Scripture! Our job is to communicate, not convert.

Some of the most famous conversions in church history have been about deeply religious people coming to Christ. Paul was a Pharisee. Martin Luther was a Priest. John Wesley was the son of a minister and an unusually godly mother, Susanna Wesley. He attended Oxford. While at Oxford, he was a member of the "Holy Club," a group so nicknamed by the other students because they seriously attempted to cultivate their spiritual lives. He became a double professor of Greek and logic at Lincoln College. He also served as his father's assistant and was ordained by the church. He even accepted an invitation from the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel to become a missionary to the American Indians in Georgia, where he utterly failed! Forced to return to England, he wrote, "I went to America to convert the Indians; but, oh, who shall convert me?" During his travels to America, he encountered some Moravians whose faith deeply impressed him. Upon his return to London, he sought out one of their leaders and, to use Wesley's words, was "clearly convinced of unbelief, of the want of that faith whereby alone we are saved." On the evening of May 24, 1738, Wesley wrote in his journal: "In the evening, I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change that God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me, that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death" (Hughes, pp. 245-46).

Paul Strengthened the Disciples

His Decision “When they asked *him* to stay a longer time with them, he did not consent, but took leave of them, saying, ‘I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem; but I will return again to you, God willing’ And he sailed from Ephesus” (18:20-21). The Jews in the synagogue at Ephesus wanted Paul to stay, but he insisted that he keep the feast of Pentecost in Jerusalem. So, promising to return if the Lord wills, Paul departed. Paul left Aquila and Priscilla in Ephesus to, no doubt, minister to the new converts. New converts need more instruction (2 Pet. 1:5-6; 3:18).

His Travels “And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up and greeted the church, he went down to Antioch” (18:22). Paul landed at Caesarea. The expressions “gone up” and “went down” indicate that Paul went to Jerusalem, where he greeted the church (Alexander). Paul traveled to Antioch from Jerusalem for his third and last time (Rackham).

“After he had spent some time *there*, he departed and went over the region of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples” (18:23). After spending time in Antioch, Paul again visited the churches in Galatia and Phrygia (13-14; 16:6; that is, Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch), strengthening the disciples. The Greek word translated “strengthened” means “to make strong, confirm” (see comments on 14:22). Disciples need more instruction. Notice that Paul strengthened the disciples in Galatia, where there was a problem with law-keeping. People are not saved by keeping the law (Gal. 3:11). Believers are not made spiritually mature by keeping the Mosaic Law (Col. 1:28; 2:16-17) nor man-made laws (Col. 2:20-23).

In August 2008, the Barna Group conducted a survey on spiritual maturity among 1005 adults, including 611 members of the clergy, randomly selected from across the continental United States. One of their conclusions was that most Christians equate spiritual maturity with following the rules. 81% of self-identified Christians embraced the notion that spiritual health is “trying hard to follow the rules described in the Bible,” and 53% strongly agreed with it! An open-ended survey question asked churchgoers to describe how their church defined a “healthy, spiritually mature follower of Jesus.” Half of the churchgoers said they were unsure, unable to guess the church’s definition. Among those who gave a substantive response, the most common responses were having a relationship with Jesus (16%), practicing spiritual disciplines like prayer and Bible study (9%), living according to the Bible (8%), being obedient (8%), being involved in church (7%), and having concern for others (6%).

Spiritual maturity is being conformed to Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:29). It is being under the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2), which is the law of love. The means of spirituality are not rules or regulations (such as being worldly is defined as not wearing make-up, not going to movies, or not observing Halloween). Some may choose not to do certain things. That is fine. Paul made a vow (18:18) and observed the feast of Pentecost (18:21). Don’t think that makes you spiritual, and don’t think everyone else has to live by your rule.

Aquila and Priscilla Instructed Apollos

His Entrance “Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man *and* mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus” (18:24). A man named Apollos came to Ephesus. His sudden appearance and disappearance make this passage seem disconnected, but the next paragraph (19:1-7) indicates that they both deal with imperfect forms of faith. Some accepted Jesus as the Messiah but were ignorant of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. (Rackham).

Apollos was a Jew who was born in Alexandria. Alexandria was a large (about 600,000) cosmopolitan city of Egyptians, Romans, Greeks, and Jews. A quarter of the population was Jewish (Wiersbe; Barclay says two out of the five wards into which Alexandria was divided were Jewish). Alexandria was not only a commercial center but also a great center for Greek and Hebrew learning. It had the greatest library of the ancient world (Alexander), with almost 700,000 volumes (Wiersbe). Apollos was, no doubt, educated.

Apollos was eloquent. The Greek word translated “eloquent” means “learned, eloquent.” It only occurs here in the New Testament. Alexander says it means “learned,” especially in history, but it probably means eloquent here. Apollos was educated (being from Alexandria) and eloquent. Apollos was also mighty in the Scripture. The Greek word translated “mighty” means “strong, mighty, powerful.” Apollos knew the Scriptures, meaning he had a strong knowledge of the Old Testament.

Luke continues to describe Apollos. “This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John” (18:25). Apollos had been instructed in the way of the Lord. The Greek word translated “instructed” means “to teach by word of mouth, instructor, informed.” Alexander says it denotes oral elementary instruction and is the Greek word from which we get the English word “catechism.” The expression “the way of the Lord” is only used elsewhere of the ministry of John the Baptist (Mt. 3:3; Mk. 1:3; Lk. 3:4; Jn. 1:23). For the expression “the Way,” see comments on Acts 9:2.

Apollos was fervent in spirit. The Greek word translated “fervent” means “be alive.” Alexander says it means “boiling” (see Rom. 12:11). Apollos was zealous and passionate. He was enthusiastic (Marshall). Martin Lloyd-Jones defines preaching as “logic on fire” (Lloyd-Jones, cited by Hughes).

Apollos spoke the things of the Lord accurately, but he only knew the baptism of John. What he said was accurate, but it was limited. It was not inaccurate; it was incomplete (Wiersbe). The Greek word translated “knew” means “know, understand.” It is a stronger word than normally renders “know” (Alexander). This does not mean that Apollos did not know the Messiah had come because John the Baptist had identified Him (Alexander). He preached that Jesus is the Messiah (Rackham), but he did not know about the day of Pentecost (Bruce).

His Education “So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately” (18:26). When Aquila and Priscilla heard Apollos speak in the synagogue, they realized he needed more information. There were “gaps in his knowledge” (Bruce).

So, they privately explained the way of God more accurately. They did not correct him publicly (Bruce). Alexander says the “way of God” is God’s method of salvation and the doctrine of His Son. Rackham says it was “the new life of the Spirit in the church.” On the other hand, Marshall thinks Apollos had received the Holy Spirit. For the expression “the Way,” see comments on Acts 18:25 and Acts 9:2.

This is a case of layman teaching the pastor. Several years ago, I discovered an article written by a student. I shared my newfound discovery with a pastor friend, telling him how much I have learned from this young man’s insight. My pastor friend expressed surprise that I had learned something from a student. Pastors need to learn and can learn from a student or a “layman.”

His Extension “And when he desired to cross to Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him; and when he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace;” (18:27). When Apollos decided to go Achaia, the brethren at Ephesus wrote a letter of

recommendation to the disciples there to welcome him (see Rom. 16:1; 2 Cor. 3:1). In Achaia, Apollos helped those, who by God's grace, believed.

“for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ” (18:28). Luke explains (“for”) that Apollos helped believers by refuting the Jews, demonstrating from the Scripture that Jesus in the Messiah. The Greek word translated “vigorously” means “vigorously, vehemently.” Alexander says Apollos was intense, meaning he was warned in his delivery and forceful in his argument. The Greek word translated “refuted” means “to confute completely.” This does not necessarily mean they changed their minds. It simply indicates their logic failed (Alexander). Such words as “vigorously” and “utterly confuted” are much stronger words than those used of Paul's preaching (Rackham).

Leaders need more instruction. Here are some of the areas where pastors need instruction. Some say:

1. To be saved, you must give your life to Christ. That is backward. Christ gave His life for us so that we might be saved.
2. To be spiritual, you must let go and let the Lord live His life through you.
3. To be blessed financially, sow a financial seed (translated: send me money).
4. If you have enough faith, God will heal you.

The Barna survey mentioned earlier asked pastors to identify the most important portions of the Bible that define spiritual maturity. One-third of pastors said, “the whole Bible.” Other generic responses included “the gospels” (17%), the New Testament (15%), and Paul's letters (10%). Overall, the survey showed that three-quarters of pastors mentioned some type of generic answer to this query. In addition, one out of every five pastors gave a *semi-generic* response, such as “Romans” or the “life of Christ.” As for *verse-specific* responses (mentioned by just one-fifth of pastors), the most common passages included Galatians 5, John 3:16, Ephesians 4, Matthew 28, and Romans 12:1-2. Just 2% of pastors specifically identified the Galatians 5 passage relating to the “fruits of the Spirit,” which includes love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, and self-control.

Summary: Unbelievers, believers, and even leaders need more instruction in the way of the Lord.

You need information. M. R. DeHaan announced that he would preach from the book of Hezekiah the following week and suggested that everyone read it carefully before the next Lord's Day. The following Sunday, he said, “Will those who read the book of Hezekiah this past week please raise your hands!” Many responded! Then he informed them that there was no such book in the Bible and that he had changed his subject to Colossians 3:9: “Lie not one to another” (*Our Daily Bread*, 10/16/1966). You need to absorb the Scripture. Read Colossians every day for thirty days. You need to mediate in the Word all day long. You need insight and discernment in the things of the Lord. Sometimes it is not what the speaker says but what is not said.

Dr. Randall Faulkner, senior pastor of the Metropolitan Baptist Church in Oklahoma City, said, “Many people, including many Christians, don't know what they don't know. Content with a superficial acquaintance with stories they learned in Sunday school, many people seem to be drawn to churches that help them feel good about themselves as they are. Others want entertainment with a little biblical teaching presented in sound bites. Some have separated ‘the

Word' from 'worship,' seeking to have their faith validated by an emotional experience rather than by the eternal and authoritative Word of God."

You need implementation. In the final analysis, the issue is not just knowledge. It is growth. Knowledge puffs up. Love builds up. It is speaking the truth in love.

Louis L'Amour, a prolific author of novels about the American West, wrote a short story about a man who liked books. In the short story, he describes the man acting suspiciously as he examines books in a public library. The man looked at one book after another until he came to a leather-bound copy of Shakespeare's *King Lear*. He ran his fingers gently over the cover. He opened the book and sniffed its pages. Suddenly, he tucked the book under his coat and bolted out the door. Someone saw him, ran after him, and caught him. Without a struggle, the man surrendered the book. Then, he explained that he had loved books all his life but couldn't read. He came to the library because he loved how books smelled and the way they felt in his hands. That is why he stole the leather-bound copy of *King Lear*.

That is a sad story. What is worse is to have a Bible, be able to read it, and it not produce spiritual maturity in you!

SHOULD YOU SEEK THE BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT?

Have you ever encountered a Christian who insisted that you need to seek the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues? One of the passages they use is an account in Acts 19, where believers received the Holy Spirit *after* their conversion and when they did, they spoke in tongues. Does that passage teach that you should seek the baptism of the Holy Spirit? Actually, there are three troubling issues in this passage: water baptism, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and speaking in tongues.

The First Question

The Question “And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus” (19:1a). The upper region is a reference to either Phrygia and Galatia or the country between them and Ephesus (Alexander). From when Paul left Ephesus (18:21) to when he returned, he traveled 1500 miles (18:22-23; Bruce). He was gone two years or more (Wiersbe). He returned to Ephesus in AD 53 (Hoehner, *Ephesus*, p. 90; Rackham says it was AD 51).

Constable explains, “Ephesus, like Athens, had reached its heyday and was in decline when Paul visited it. Its claim to fame was twofold. Its location on the west coast of Asia Minor near the mouth of the Cayster River made it an important commercial center. As commerce declined due to the silting up of the port at Ephesus, its religious influence continued to draw worshippers to the Temple of Artemis (Greek) or Diana (Roman). This temple was four times the size of the Parthenon at Athens and was renowned as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.” Ephesus had 300,000 inhabitants (Wiersbe).

Barclay explains, “The greatest glory of Ephesus was the Temple of Artemis. Artemis and Diana were one and the same, Artemis being the Greek name, Diana the Latin. This temple was one of the Seven Wonders of the World. It was 425 feet long by 220 feet wide by 60 feet high. There were 127 pillars, each the gift of a king. They were all of glittering Parian marble and 36 were marvelously gilt and inlaid. The great altar had been carved by Praxiteles, the greatest of all Greek sculptors. The image of Artemis was not beautiful. It was a black, squat, many-breasted figure signifying fertility; it was so old that no one knew where it had come from or even of what material it was made. The story was that it had fallen from heaven.”

“And finding some disciples he said to them, ‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?’” (19:1b-2a). Arriving in Ephesus (18:21), Paul found “some disciples.” Paul asked them if they had received the Holy Spirit when they believed. The construction in the Greek text indicates a simultaneous action of believing and receiving (Alexander). Paul’s encounter with these men raises several questions.

Who were they? Many commentaries conclude that these men were not saved (McGee; Constable); they “professed to be *disciples*” (Rackham; Wiersbe); they “claimed to be Christians” (Marshall, who calls them “semi-Christians”!). Marshall argues, “These men can hardly have been Christian since they had not received the gift of the Spirit. It is safe to say that the New Testament does not recognize the possibility of being a Christian apart from the

possession of the Spirit (Jn. 3:5; Acts 11:17; Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 12:3; Gal. 3:2; 1 Thess. 1:5f.; Tit. 3:5; Heb. 6:4; 1 Pet. 1:2; 1 Jn. 3:24, 4:13).”

On the other hand, Luke calls them “disciples (19:1) and Paul says they “believed” (19:1). It is unlikely that used without qualification the term “disciples” can refer to disciples of John the Baptist (Marshall, who says Luke is not calling them disciples; he is describing how they appeared to Paul!). According to Luke’s usage in the book of Acts, when “disciple” appears without qualification, it means a disciple of Jesus (Bruce). These men were believers and disciples of Jesus, but they were deficient (Rackham); their knowledge was defective (Bruce). They were “incomplete Christians” (Barclay).

Why did Paul ask them if they had received the Holy Spirit? Something must have aroused his suspicion. Perhaps they were following the example of John the Baptist and living a life of rigid ascetics or maybe they failed to understand Paul’s teaching (Rackham).

The Answer “So they said to him, ‘We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit’” (19:2b). When they said they had not heard whether there is a Holy Spirit, they did not mean they did not know about the *person* of the Holy Spirit (Rackham). They had received John’s baptism and John clearly taught that the One coming after him would baptize with the Holy Spirit (Mt. 3:11; Mk. 1:7-8; Lk. 3:16; Jn. 1:33). Their answer must be understood in this context. Since they had received John’s baptism, presumably, they would have been told that John’s baptism was preparation for One coming to baptize with the Holy Spirit (Bruce). What they had not heard of was a *work* of the Holy Spirit. Before the death and resurrection of Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, believers were not baptized with the Holy Spirit (Jn. 16:13; Acts 2:4, 11:15-16; 1 Cor. 12:13). Thus, these men had heard John the Baptist speak and had received his water baptism. They had believed Jesus was the Messiah and were His disciples (19:1), but they had not received the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

During the latter part of the 18th century, many colonists left Virginia and started through the mountain to settle in the valley far to the West. Some were forced to stay in the mountains, whether through fear of Indians or because of the death of a horse or the breaking down of a wagon, making it impossible for them to take their goods further. Twenty years passed, during which they saw no white men. Finally, a group of travelers went through the region where these isolated settlers lived. Naturally, there was much conversation about the outside world. The travelers might have asked the mountaineers what they thought about the Republic and the policies of Congress. The isolated ones would have answered, “We have not so much as heard that there is a congress of Republic.” Then they would have gone on to say that they thought of themselves as loyal subjects of the British king, that they had not so much as heard of George Washington, the Revolutionary War, or the establishment of the Republic, but when they were told all that had happened, they entered into a new understanding of their new status and became American citizens in that hour by knowledge, as they had been by some time in fact (Barnhouse, *Exposition of Romans*, vol. 4, p. 127). After coming into contact with the teaching of John the Baptist, these men had become spiritual Rip Van Winkles (Hughes).

The Second Question

The Question “And he said to them, ‘Into what then were you baptized?’” (19:3a). The first question was about the Holy Spirit (19:2). The second was about water baptism.

The Answer “So they said, ‘Into John’s baptism’” (19:3b). There are four water baptisms (“baptisms,” plural, in Heb. 6:2): the baptism of repentance by John the Baptist, the baptism of

Jesus, which was one of a kind, the baptism by the apostles before the crucifixion, and the baptism of believers. These disciples of John had received the baptism of repentance by John the Baptist. The baptism of repentance looked forward to the coming Messiah, while believer's baptism looks back to the finished work of Christ and His resurrection (Wiersbe).

The Result

Their Water Baptism “Then Paul said, ‘John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus’” (19:4). Paul explains the baptism of John, which indicated that there was more to come.

“When they heard *this*, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus” (19:5). As a result of Paul's explanation, these disciples were baptized in the name of Jesus (8:16); they received believer's baptism. “An anticipatory baptism was no longer appropriate or adequate” (Bruce). They had not been baptized in the name of Jesus (Marshall). This is the only passage in the New Testament that records a second water baptism.

Their Spiritual Baptism “And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied” (19:6). After they received believer's baptism, they received the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands. This is identical to the experience of the Samaritans. Philip led the Samaritans to Christ and baptized them (8:12). Then, Peter and John laid hands on the new converts and they received the Holy Spirit (8:14-17).

Their speaking in tongues is similar to the experience of the believers on the day of Pentecost; they spoke in tongues, languages they did not know. In the book of Acts, people speak in tongues on three occasions: in Acts 2, Acts 10, and Acts 19. Paul says that tongues are for a sign to the unbelieving (1 Cor. 14:22) Jews (see “this people” in 1 Cor. 14:21). As Constable points out, these three were to validate for Jews the coming of the Spirit, to validate for Jews God's acceptance of Gentiles, and to validate for Jews Paul's message.

“Now the men were about twelve in all” (19:7). Luke explains that about twelve disciples received the Holy Spirit. In other words, there were not many, no more than twelve (Alexander).

Summary: When Paul encountered twelve men who had believed in Jesus but had only received the water baptism of John the Baptist, he baptized them in the name of Jesus and laid hands on them to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Believers need to be baptized in water after conversion. Why? Because Jesus commanded it (Mt. 28:19-20). It symbolizes your old life being buried and you being raised to walk in the newness of life (Rom. 6). So, if you have not been baptized since you trusted Christ, you need to be baptized. If you were baptized before you were converted, you need to be baptized, not again, but for the first time.

Believers do not need to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit after conversion. In Acts 19, they received the Holy Spirit after conversion. Does that mean believers need to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit after conversion? No. This is a special case of believers receiving the Holy Spirit after conversion. Marshall says, “This story has often been used as the basis for doctrines about the reception of gifts of the Spirit subsequent to conversion, but it has no real connection with these. Rather, Paul was dealing with an unusual situation which required special treatment.”

What is the norm? The baptism of the Holy Spirit began on the day of Pentecost (see the future tense in 1:5 and “at the beginning” in 11:15-16). Those who were saved on the day of Pentecost received the baptism of the Holy Spirit *at* their conversion (2:38), as did the first Gentiles who believed (10:43-45; 11:15-16). That is the norm. People receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit *at* conversion (Eph. 1:13). In fact, anyone without the Holy Spirit is not a Christian (Rom. 8:9).

There were two exceptions. The Samaritans received the baptism of the Holy Spirit after their conversion by the laying on of hands of Peter so that there would be unity between the church in Jerusalem and the church in Samaria (8:14-17). The second exception is twelve men in Acts 19, who were saved before the day of Pentecost. Hence, they missed the baptism of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Moreover, this experience of Paul laying hands on people to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit demonstrates that Paul has the same authority as Peter.

It has been suggested that there is an intentional parallel between Peter and Paul’s laying on hands to receive the Holy Spirit (Bruce). Both heal a lame man (3:2-8; 14:8-10), both exorcise demons (5:16; 16:18), both have an encounter with a sorcerer (8:18-24; 13:6-11), both raise the dead (9:36-41), both experience miraculous deliverance from prison (12:7-11; 16:25-26). Paul has the same authority as Peter (see Marshall).

So, when you trusted Christ, you received the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13). In Christ, you have all spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3). You are complete in Christ (Col. 2:10). The Baptism of the Holy Spirit places believers into Christ (Rom. 6) and into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). It *unites* believers to Christ and to each other.

You have received the Holy Spirit; do not grieve the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30-32). Sin grieves the Holy Spirit (Ps. 78:40-42; Heb. 3:10).” If we consider how much pain God feels when we are disobedient, we will find ample motivation to shun what is wrong and pursue what is right” (V. C. Grounds).

You have received the Holy Spirit; walk in the Spirit (Gal. 5:16). In Galatians 5, to walk in the Spirit means to walk according to or by the rule of the Spirit, that is, regulate your life by the rule/direction of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:18, 25; 6:16). This is done through the Word of God, which the Spirit of God-inspired. The thrust of that rule/direction is love. Walk in the Spirit also means to walk by the help of the Holy Spirit, that is, as you obey the Word, depending on the Holy Spirit for enablement, power. The word “walk,” which denotes effort and activity, seems to be the opposite of dependence, but maybe that is the concept Paul means to convey. It is a picture of a man walking on crutches.

BELIEVERS LIVING IN SIN!

Some suggest that conversion to Christ is so complete that for Christians to continue in sin is impossible. All admit believers sin, but when believers continue in sin, or the sin is of the more serious type, eyebrows are raised. Is it possible for believers to practice sin—serious sin?

Paul's Ministry: Some Believed

The Synagogue “And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God” (19:8). At the synagogue in Ephesus, Paul reasoned with and tried to persuade the Jews and Gentile converts to Judaism (18:4) concerning things about the kingdom of God. At Thessalonica, Paul “reasoned with them from the Scriptures explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead” (17:2-3; see comments on 17:2). Before Felix, he “reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come” (24:25). Here he reasoned with people concerning things about the kingdom of God (see Philip’s preaching in 8:12). Many commentators define the kingdom of God as the “new dispensation,” that is, the church (Alexander), but the Kingdom of God is the future rule of God on the earth (see comments on 1:3; 1:6, and 14:22). The message was about Jesus *and* the kingdom (28:31).

The Stubbornness “But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude” (19:9a). Some in the synagogue reacted negatively. The Greek word translated “hardened” means “to harden, make stubborn” (Rom. 9:18; Heb. 3:8, 13, 15; 4:7). Alexander says they became “obstinate in unbelief.” He also says that “did not believe” is not a mere negation but a “positive refusal.” Rackham says Luke traces the reason for their unbelief back, not to predestination, but to moral causes, to the heart. The Greek word translated “spoke evil of” means “to speak evil of, revile, abuse.” It comes from the Greek word for “slanderous.” Alexander says it is equivalent to blaspheming. They slandered “the Way.” The Way has been taken to mean “the new religion” (Alexander; see comments on 9:2).

The School “He departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus” (19:9b). Paul departed from the synagogue and he withdrew his disciples from the synagogue. The Greek word translated “withdrew” means “to mark off by boundaries from, separate from.” Paul and his disciples began meeting in the school of Tyrannus. Tyrannus was either the teacher or the owner of the building (Bruce; Marshall). Alexander says Paul formed a separate society or church.

Rackham explains that Tyrannus had a school or lecture room found in some gymnasium. He says, “In the out-of-door life of the ancient world, among the most important features of a city were its places of public resort. For this purpose, western and Roman cities had their ‘baths,’ and Greek and eastern cities their ‘gymnasia.’ These gymnasia, whose original purpose had been simply the exercise of the body in athletic sports, had long since become places of general recreation. Besides running and wrestling grounds, they included gardens, walks, and colonnades, together with a number of halls and semicircular ‘exedrae.’ These buildings were made use of by grammarians, poets, and philosophers, for giving lectures and recitations. To listen to such ‘displays’ was a favorite way of killing time, and so the word for leisure, *schole*

(school), came to be applied to the lecture itself, and from the lecture, it passed on to the place of delivery and to the class who attended. Ephesus had no less than five gymnasia, and possibly in one of these was the school which had been built by or was the scene of the labors of Tyrannus. By some arrangement—which in this case would have implied the permission of the ‘gymnasiarch’—S. Paul obtained the use of it.”

In their new setting, Paul reasoned daily with people (see comments on 17:2). The Western Geek text, which is not a reliable Greek text, says Paul used the building from 11 am to 4 pm. The workday began at 7, stopped from 11 to 4, and continued from 4 until 9:30 pm. More people were asleep at 1 pm than at 1 am, which means those who heard Paul were willing to forgo their siesta (see Barclay; Bruce). They were willing to listen to Paul teach at an inconvenient time! This would be like a church today setting their teaching time at 5:00 am.

The Success “And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks” (19:10). As a result of Paul’s two-year ministry in Ephesus, Luke says, “all” in Asia heard the word. This may be hyperbole, but it may also have been true. During these years, Epaphras appears to have evangelized Colosse, Laodicea, and Hierapolis (Bruce). Perhaps the seven churches of Asia mentioned in Revelation were founded during this time (Alexander; Bruce). At any rate, Gentiles and Jews in Asia heard the gospel.

Paul’s Miracles: Believers Confessed

The Miracles “Now God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them” (19:11-12). The Lord not only used Paul to spread the Word, He also used Paul to work unusual miracles. When placed on the sick and demon-possessed, Paul’s handkerchiefs and aprons were used to heal. These were probably pieces Paul used in tent making, the sweatband around his head and the apron around his waist (Bruce; Barclay). What happened here parallels what happened to Jesus (Mk. 5:27-34; 6:56) and is similar to what Peter did (5:12-16). Peter’s shadow possesses the power ascribed to Paul (Rackham).

In the time covered by the Bible, there are only three periods of miracles: 1) the time of Moses and Joshua, 2) the time of Elijah and Elisha, and 3) the time of Jesus and the apostles. Wiersbe says each period was less than 100 years and, depending on how some events are classified, the total number of miracles for all three periods is less than 100. God enabled Paul to perform “special miracles” in Ephesus because it was the center of the occult; Paul was demonstrating God’s power in Satan’s territory.

The Imitation “Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists took it upon themselves to call the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, ‘We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches’” (19:13). Some itinerant Jewish exorcists attempted to duplicate Paul’s exorcism by using the name of Jesus, but not the Jesus they knew, the Jesus Paul preached. Exorcism was common and the best exorcists were thought to know the names of the more powerful spirits. It was believed that the Jewish priests had access to the secret name of the God of Israel and that its pronunciation had a special power over the spirit world (Bruce cited by Hughes). “A magical formula preserved in the Paris magical papyrus reads, ‘I adjure thee by the God of the Hebrews, Jesus’” (Marshall).

“Also there were seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, who did so” (19:14). More specifically, there were seven sons of Sceva, who are identified as a Jewish chief priest. Perhaps the expression “Jewish chief priest” *could* refer to a Jewish high priest from Jerusalem residing

in Ephesus, but no person by that name was ever *the* Jewish high priest (Marshall). It is also possible that “chief priest” refers to a renegade or an apostate Jew who was a chief priest of Diana. The term “chief priest” repeatedly occurs on coins and other inscriptions relating to the worship of Diana at Ephesus (Alexander). Rackham suggests that Sceva may have been a priest who was also a ruler of a synagogue. Bruce surmises that it was a self-designation. Marshall says he was either a member of the high priestly family or he assumed the title for professional purposes.

The Response “And the evil spirit answered and said, ‘Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you? Then the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overpowered them, and prevailed against them so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded’ (19:15-16). The demons responded by telling the imitators that they knew Jesus and they knew Paul, but they did not know them. One creative preacher remarked, “Paul was known in hell, but they were not.” At that point, the demon-possessed man overpowered the imitators, who fled naked and wounded. These would be “Christian” exorcists who were unable to duplicate the power Paul displayed, which highlighted Paul’s power.

The Result “This became known both to all Jews and Greeks dwelling in Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified” (19:17). When this incident became known in Ephesus, fear fell on the Gentiles as well as the Jews. The name of Jesus, whose name had been “profaned by the exorcists,” was “now magnified, extolled, and honored, by their ignominious defeat and punishment” (Alexander).

“And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds” (19:18). Believers were affected. From the next verse, it is obvious that these believers were involved in magical practices. Were these “believers” genuine believers? Yes. The text says they believed. Commentators recognized that they were believers. Alexander says, “A further effect of this remarkable occurrence was to touch the conscience of the many converts and constrained them to acknowledge their malpractices.” Notice he calls them converts. He goes on to say that the Greek participle indicates that those who had believed, that is, had been converted, were now reawakened by the proof of Paul’s ministry and God’s displeasure at all magical and occult arts. Pointing out that pagan ways of thinking can persist alongside genuine Christian experience, Marshall says, “The history of the church in Corinth shows that Christians took some time to be persuaded that sexual immorality and idol worship were ultimately incompatible with the Christian faith (1 Cor. 6:9-11).” Wiersbe states, “These believers apparently had not made a clean break with sin and were still practicing their magic, but the Lord dealt with them.”

Believers can practice sin, serious sin. They practiced magic (19:19). I have been to a mission field where I was told believers continued to practice some of their old pagan rituals. Moses committed murder. David committed adultery. Peter denied the Lord.

Believers should confess their sins and admit it is a serious offense against God. Confession is saying the same thing God says. God says sin is serious. Sin is serious. Christ died for it. He did not pay a fine or go to jail for five years. He died. Sin is serious. It brings the discipline of God (1 Cor. 11:31). Sin is serious; it causes the loss of reward in the kingdom (19:8; Gal. 5:19-21).

While looking for a book, a gentleman in India felt a slight pain in his finger, like the prick of a pin. He took little notice of it, but soon, his arm began to swell and in a very short time, he was dead. An autopsy revealed that he had been poisoned. After a brief search, his loved ones found a deadly serpent among the volumes on his library shelf. What lingers among the books and what is in some books can kill you.

“Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned *them* in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and *it* totaled fifty thousand *pieces* of silver” (19:19). Ephesus was famous for magical practices (Alexander) and some converts continued in those practices. These convicted believers not only confessed the practice of magic, they publicly burned their books (parchments; rolls; etc.), which contained the magical formulas (Rackham compares this to the “bonfires of vanities,” which resulted from the preaching of Savonarola at Florence). The value of these books was exceedingly great. Marshall says this corresponds to the wages of 50,000 workmen for a day’s work. Wiersbe calculates the value as equivalent to the salaries of 150 men working for a year. Nevertheless, they burned them rather than sell them. Barclay notes, “It is all too true that many of us hate our sins, but either we cannot leave them at all, or we do so with a lingering and backward look. There are times when only the clean and final break will suffice.

The 400-member congregation of the Columbia Road Baptist Church (SBC) of North Olmstead, Ohio, decided to have a book burning, but the officials of this Cleveland suburb said local law prohibits open-air burnings larger than a barbecue. So they settled for a garbage truck to crush and chew up the objectionable material. Rev. John Withers, 34, pastor at the church for the past nine years, was the first to toss in a set of biblical commentaries, *The Interpreter’s Bible*. He said he purchased them in seminary and had them for 15 years, but they were too liberal for him. Other items tossed into the garbage truck included bikinis, smoking pipes, hard rock records, pornographic magazines, and an Ouija board (*Dallas Morning News*, 10/15/1977). Ouija boards should be burned. Some TV channels should be boycotted and some Internet sites should be blocked.

“So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed” (19:20). The word of the Lord, that is, the gospel (Alexander), continued to spread.

Summary: As a result of the demonstration of the power of God through Paul and the failure of those who tried to imitate him, believers gave up their practice of magic and the gospel spread.

Rackham observes that what happens at Ephesus answers the question of the beginning of the church in Jerusalem. At the beginning was the baptism of John (1:5), followed by the coming of the Holy Spirit (2:1-4) manifested in speaking with tongues and prophecy (2:5-13), an outburst of miraculous energy (2:43, 5:12-16), a decisive judgment on hypocrisies within (5:1-11) and without (8:18-24), a consequent exhibition of repentance (2:37-43), and of self-abnegation in the matter of money and possessions (2:44, 4:32-35).

Rackham also points out that “at Ephesus, S. John, the last of the Twelve, fixed his abode, bequeathed his Gospel to the church, and died. With Ephesus and Asia are associated most of the great names of early church history, S. Polycarp and S. Irenaeus, Papias of Hierapolis, Polycrates of Ephesus, and Melito of Sardis. ‘Asia’ was indeed the heart of the church, the scene of its greatest activity. This is also evident from the growth of heresies, which fully justified the apostolic warnings and anticipations. The names of Cerinthus of Ephesus, Marcion of Pontus, and Montanus of Phrygia, have given Asia an unhappy notoriety. But if the exuberance of error dims the glory, it is the sign of the vitality, of a church. In later centuries political and natural causes brought about a decline. The silting up of its harbor destroyed the prosperity of Ephesus. Asia declined with the decay of the empire, and the invasion of Mohammedanism overwhelmed its churches. Today the port of Ephesus is a marsh, and its site is marked by a few ruins: ‘its candlestick has been removed out of its place.’ A small village still exists in the neighborhood of

the once famous temple of Artemis; but the temple itself fell into ruins, was covered with rubbish, and utterly lost, until its remains were discovered and excavated in the year 1869 by an English architect, Mr. J. T. Woods.”

We are no longer sensitive to sin. The Dutch philosopher Soren Kierkegaard told a parable of a wild duck. Flying north across Europe with his friends one spring a wild duck landed in a Danish barnyard where there were tame ducks. He ate some of their corn, stayed for an hour, then a day, then a week, then a month. Finally relishing the food and the safety of the barnyard, he stayed all summer. One fall day, when his wild duck friends were winging their way south again, they passed over the barnyard. Their old friend sitting in the barnyard saw them pass by and decided to rejoin them. The flapping of his wings lifted in the air to join his old comrades, but he found that the food had made him so soft and heavy he could rise no higher than the eaves of the barn. So he dropped back again to the barnyard and said to himself, “My life is safe here and the food is good.” Every spring and fall, when he heard the wild ducks honking, his eyes would brighten for a moment and he would begin to flap his wings, but finally, the day came when the wild ducks flew over, but he paid not the slightest attention to them.

We need to have a bonfire. Having the words of the Bible in your mind is not the same as having the mind of Christ. Observing that in Luke 14, Jesus taught us to invite all to the banquet and in Acts 19, people were invited to a bonfire, a preacher said, “What the church needs today is a Luke 14 banquet and an Acts 19 bonfire.”

A STUDY OF MOTIVATION

What motivates you? A story in the book of Acts was put there to say something about Christianity, in the process, it records the actions of several people, which, in turn, indicates something about their motivations. Which one of these describes you?

Paul was Motivated by the Ministry

His Service “When these things were accomplished, Paul purposed in the Spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, ‘After I have been there, I must also see Rome’” (19:21). After the book burning and the results that followed (19:17-20), Paul determined to take a trip. The Greek word translated “purposed” means “to place, set, fix, establish.” The phrase “in the Spirit” means “under the divine direction” or “determined by the Holy Spirit” (Alexander).

Paul planned to go through Macedonia (the province containing Thessalonica and Philippi) and Achaia (the province containing Corinth) on his way to Jerusalem. Luke does not say why he is going to Jerusalem, but Paul says he was going to Jerusalem to deliver the collection for the poor saints there (1 Cor. 16:1-9; 1 Cor. was written from Ephesus during this time; see also Rom. 15:25-26, 15:30-32; Romans was written from Corinth on this trip.). After Jerusalem, Paul intended to visit Rome (19:21) and, after that, Spain (Rom. 15:28). This is the first mention of Paul’s plan to go to Rome.

“What dreams he dreamt! Macedonia, Archaia, Jerusalem, Rome! Truly neither Alexander, nor Caesar, nor any hero of antiquity was a match for this little Benjamite in the magnanimity of his designs” (Scroggie, cited by Campbell, p. 310).

His Sacrifice “So he sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, but he himself stayed in Asia for a time” (19:22). Paul sent Timothy and Erastus to Macedonia, to begin the collection for the poor at Jerusalem. Timothy and Erastus (see Rom. 16:23; Bruce thinks it is unlikely that the Erastus here is the same as the one mentioned in Rom. 16) were personal attendants and fellow laborers in the ministry (Alexander). To serve others, Paul sacrificed the benefits of those who ministered to him. Paul remained in Ephesus for a time. The implication seems to be that Paul was not driven out of town by what is described next (Marshall).

Paul was motivated by serving others, even if that meant sacrificing himself. Jesus is our example. He came to serve and be sacrificed. Paul says, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her” (Eph. 5:25).

Demetrius was Motivated by Money

The Man “And about that time there arose a great commotion about the Way” (19:23). After the departure of Timothy and Erastus, a great commotion arose. The implication is that before the commotion, there was tranquility and freedom from disturbance (Alexander). The expression

“the Way” refers to Christianity, which is considered a way of salvation, thinking, and living (Alexander). For the expression “the Way,” see comments on Acts 9:2.

“For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana, brought no small profit to the craftsmen” (19:24). Luke explains the cause of the uproar (“for”). A silversmith named Demetrius made either metals with the image of Diana or small models of her (Alexander). It was a lucrative business.

Diana was the patron goddess of Ephesus (Rackham). Her Greek name was Artemis (Diana is Latin). Her distinctive attribute was greatness. She was called by that title and some inscriptions call her of the “Most Great Goddess” (Rackham). She was a female figure with many breasts and her festival was celebrated with wild orgies and carousing (Marshall). Thus, Ephesus was one of the most immoral cities of its time (Campbell, p. 304). Tourists in the ruins of Ephesus today can see footprints in the sidewalks designed to lead sailors to the brothels. Her temple, built in beautiful Ionic style, was 418 feet long and 239 feet wide with 100 columns 56 feet high (Rackham). It was one of the Seven Wonders of the World, four times larger than the Parthenon.

The Meeting “He called them together with the workers of similar occupation, and said: “Men, you know that we have our prosperity by this trade” (19:25). Demetrius gathered his fellow craftsmen. He was probably the president (Bruce) of Silversmith Local 666 (Hughes). He reminded them that they had a profitable business as a modern production of souvenirs for tourists (Marshall).

“Moreover, you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are not gods which are made with hands” (19:26). Demetrius goes on to explain that Paul has persuaded people throughout all Asia to turn away from the worship of Diana because gods are not made with hands (17:29).

“So not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship” (19:27). Demetrius warned that their trade, the temple of Diana, and Diana herself was in danger. Their trade would fall into disrepute. The Greek word for “disrepute” only appears here. Alexander says it may have been coined for this occasion. He suggests that based on its etymology, it signifies not mere contempt in general but logical or rational contempt rising from a *reductio ad absurdum*. The temple of Diana would be despised. The Greek construction denotes being reckoned as nothing. Alexander says this is stronger than “despised.” The tradition of Diana would be destroyed. The Greek word translated “destroyed” means “to take down, to put down by force, destroy.” In a strict sense, it could refer to the temple of Diana. In the figurative sense, it is about the dishonor of Diana (Alexander).

These people were motivated by money. Their livelihood was threatened. Their worship was their wealth. The growth of Christianity had touched the most sensitive part of their anatomy—their pocketbook (Hughes). The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil (1 Tim. 6:10).

There are different types of vegetarians. Lacto-vegetarians eat dairy products but not eggs. Lacto-ovo vegetarians eat both eggs and dairy products. Pollo-vegetarians eat fowl, like chicken and turkey, but avoid red meat and pork. Then, there are “flexitarians,” who mainly eat vegetarian food but will occasionally make exceptions. Some believers are flexitarians; they are not motivated by money but occasionally make exceptions.

The Crowd was Motivated by a Mob Mentality

The Craftsmen “Now when they heard *this*, they were full of wrath and cried out, saying, “Great is Diana of the Ephesians!” (19:28). When the craftsmen heard what Demetrius said, they were filled with wrath and cried out, “Great is Diana of the Ephesians.” Benjamin Franklin said that a mob is a monster with heads but no brains.

The City “So the whole city was filled with confusion, and rushed into the theater with one accord, having seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians, Paul’s travel companions” (19:29). The issue spread throughout the city. The people did not understand exactly what was going on; they were confused.

A man wore an unusual lapel button. It had four letters on it: “B.A.I.K!” A friend asked, “What does B.A.I.K. stand for?” “Boy, Am I Konfused!” the fellow replied. “But confused doesn’t begin with K,” his friend argued. “Well, I guess that just goes to show how confused I am!”

Confused, the mob seized two of Paul’s traveling companions and rushed into the theater (Alexander). The open-air theater was a semicircular, unroofed enclosure with tiers of stone seats rising one above another (Alexander). The ruins can still be seen. When I saw it, a sign said it would hold 24,000 people (see Rackham). It was the regular meeting place of the assembly (Bruce).

If this had happened today, it would be reported on the evening news. M. R. DeHaan II imagines the report sounding like this. “Police donned riot gear in Ephesus today to control an angry mob of workers. Although confusion dominated the scene, a few things are clear. The commotion was initiated by members of a local silversmith’s union. They contend that the rapidly growing Jesus sect known as ‘the Way’ is creating a serious threat to the economic and religious interests of the community. A spokesman for the group said that a radical named Paul is spreading separatist doctrine that could hurt the tourist traffic to the temple of Diana. This would cut off the sale of silver idols, a trade affecting the livelihood of many local craftsmen” (*Our Daily Bread*, 9/1/1973).

The motive of the mob was to go along with the crowd. Max Lerner wrote in *The Unfinished Country*, “Every mob, in its ignorance and blindness and bewilderment, is a League of Frightened Men that seeks reassurance in collective action” (Lerner, cited by Wiersbe). We follow others without hearing both sides and without thinking. “Confusion is the result of improper exercise; it is jumping to conclusions rather than digging for facts.”

The City Officials were Motivated by “My Interests”

The Disciples “And when Paul wanted to go in to the people, the disciples would not allow him” (19:30). Paul wanted to go to the theater, but the disciples did not permit him to go, no doubt, for fear of his safety (Marshall) and their own.

The Provincial Officials “Then some of the officials of Asia, who were his friends, sent to him pleading that he would not venture into the theater” (19:31). The Greek word translated “officials of Asia” means “Asiarch.” These were a group of 10 officials selected by the various cities in the province of Asia, whose duty was to celebrate public games and festivals at their own expense (A-S). They were chosen annually to conduct the sacrificial services and public games in honor of Diana. They were from the richest class and represented the highest-ranked in the community (Alexander). Some of them had become friends, or at least friendly with Paul

(Alexander; Marshall). When these officials heard what was happening, they sent a message to Paul, either by messenger or by letter, pleading with him not to venture into the theater.

Alexander “Some, therefore, cried one thing and some another, for the assembly was confused, and most of them did not know why they had come together” (19:32). In the meantime, there was confusion in the theater. Most did not even know why they had assembled together. Some were shouting one thing and others another.

“And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander motioned with his hand, and wanted to make his defense to the people” (19:33). The Jews selected Alexander to speak to the crowd. Some suppose that this Alexander is the same one spoken of by Paul in 2 Timothy 4:14 (Calvin), but the name “Alexander” was as common as Smith or Jones. Furthermore, there was a difference in time and place between these two references to Alexander.

As Alexander stood before them, he motioned with his hand for them to be quiet so he could make his defense. The text does not express whether the defense was for himself or the Jews, but it was probably a defense of the Jews as a community. The Jews were known to be disbelievers in Diana. Alexander’s job was to make it clear to the crowd that the Jews had nothing to do with Paul (Bruce).

“But when they found out that he was a Jew, all with one voice cried out for about two hours, “Great is Diana of the Ephesians!” (19:34). When the crowd discovered that Alexander was a Jew, they began the chant in unison, “Great is Diana of the Ephesians.” This went on for about two hours. They were in no mood to hear a Jew because they knew Jews did not worship Diana (Bruce). In their hysterical mood, they shouted down Alexander (Marshall). It was a “religious mob” that shouted “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” to Pilate. Imagine a stadium filled with people chanting, “Great are the Dodgers of Los Angeles.”

The City Clerk “And when the city clerk had quieted the crowd, he said: “Men of Ephesus, what man is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple guardian of the great goddess Diana, and of the *image* which fell down from Zeus?” (19:35). As is true in any city today, there were levels of government in Ephesus. Rackham explains that there were four authorities at Ephesus. 1) The proconsul was the supreme authority of Rome. Court days were held by the proconsul in Ephesus (19:38). 2) The *Asiarchate* was a provincial office (19:31). Each province had a Common (Council) composed of delegates from the chief cities for the management of common provincial business. In this business, the chief element was the supervision of the provincial worship of the emperor, a cult that furnished, besides a test of loyalty, a bond of unity for the empire. The common council president acted as high-priest and presided over the festivities and games, which were given at his expense. In return, he enjoyed the title of Ruler of the province. 3) Ephesus was a free city and retained its democratic Greek constitution. There was a Senate, but nominally, Ephesus was still governed by the people assembled in their Ecclesia or Assembly (19:30). Regular or ordinary assemblies were held three times a month, but an extraordinary assembly could be convened (19:32). The powers of the ecclesia were limited to purely domestic and formal matters. The secretary of the ecclesia, the town clerk (19:35), summoned and dismissed the assembly, prepared the agenda, kept the minutes, and acted as chairman. 4) The festival of Artemisia was celebrated in honor of Artemis (Diana). These levels of government were like our federal, state, and city governments.

The city clerk was able to quiet the crowd. He told them that everyone knew that Ephesus was the guardian of the temple of Diana, reminding them that the image of Diana fell from Zeus.

According to Pliny and other ancient writers, a wooden image of Diana had outlived seven restorations of the temple and was, therefore, said to have dropped from heaven (Alexander).

“Therefore, since these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rashly” (19:36). The clerk concludes (“therefore”) that since everyone knows Diana fell from Zeus, there is no need for them to do anything, certainly not anything rash. The city clerk was not defending Christianity. He was defending law and order, anxious that the city not get a reputation for disorderliness and illegal action (Marshall). The Greek word translated “harshly” means “rash, reckless.” After all, Diana’s position was undeniable and unassailable (Bruce). A colonial American clergyman, Cotton Mather, said he was much indebted to the wise Ephesians official who counseled, “Do nothing hastily.” Concerning proposals of importance, he would frequently say, “Let’s first consult a little with the town clerk of the Ephesus.” Someone said, “Hurry is the mother of most mistakes.”

“For you have brought these men here who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of your goddess” (19:37). The clerk explains (“for”) that the men who were seized (19:29) neither rob the temple nor blasphemed their goddess. There was no formal charge. There was nothing of public concern (Marshall).

“Therefore, if Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a case against anyone, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. Let them bring charges against one another” (19:38). The clerk further concludes (“therefore”) that if an individual had a case against anyone, they should bring charges against them in the courts. At this point, the clerk is talking about personal private issues (Alexander).

“But if you have any other inquiry to make, it shall be determined in the lawful assembly” (19:39). By “any other inquiry,” the clerk is speaking about matters of public interest (Alexander). The dispute should be decided in a lawful public meeting in those cases. In other words, in a regular meeting of the assembly (Bruce). The implication is that the current assembly was not unlawful in the sense that it was forbidden but in the sense that it was without authority (Alexander).

“For we are in danger of being called in question for today’s uproar, there being no reason which we may give to account for this disorderly gathering” (19:40). As the clerk explains, the current assembly created a dangerous situation because it was disorderly. The Roman government was extraordinarily strict concerning riotous disturbances (Bruce). The Greek word used for “danger” is the same as the one used by Demetrius (19:27).

“And when he had said these things, he dismissed the assembly” (19:41). When he finished, the clerk dismissed the assembly, as he would have done at the end of a regular assembly (Bruce). After such a sober speech, they no doubt left quietly.

The motive of the city clerk was self-interest (Barclay). Concerning the city clerk, Barclay says, “He saved Paul and his companions, but he saved them because he was saving his own skin.”

Summary: Paul was motivated by ministry, but others were motivated by money, mob mentality, and “my interest.”

In Thessalonica, the opposition came from the Jews. In Philippi, it came because of interference with a vested interest. In this case, it came from a Gentile vested interest, not the Jews, the government, or the doctrine of Christianity. The incident in Ephesus has an apologetic element in this event (Bruce). The story serves as a statement that Christians are not a danger to the state and a plea that they be treated with tolerance in a pluralistic society (Marshall). Wiersbe

points out that Paul had this same kind of “official approval” in Philippi (16:35-40) and in Corinth (18:12-17). He goes on to say that “throughout the book of Acts, Luke makes it clear that the persecution of Christians was incited by unbelieving Jews, not by the Romans.”

Paul was motivated by service to the point of sacrifice. He said he fought with beasts at Ephesus (1 Cor. 15:32). He wrote to the Corinthian, “For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us” (2 Cor. 1:8-10).

Believers should grow in their new life in Christ until it pushes out the old life. Donald Grey Barnhouse tells of visiting the battlefields of Belgium after World War I. “In the first year of the war, the area around the city of Mons was the scene of the great British retreat; in the last year of the war, it was the scene of the greater German retreat. For miles to the west of the city the roads were lined with artillery, tanks, trucks, and other materials of war, which the Germans had abandoned in their hasty flight.

“It was a lovely day in spring; the sun was shining; not a breath of wind was blowing. As Dr. Barnhouse walked along examining the German war material, he noticed that leaves were falling from the great trees that arched above the road. He brushed at a leaf that had blown against his chest; it became caught in the belt of his uniform. As he picked it out, he pressed it in his fingers and it disintegrated. Dr. Barnhouse looked up curiously and saw several other leaves falling from the trees. It was not autumn. There was no wind to blow them off. They were the leaves that had outlived the winds of autumn and the frosts of winter. Now, they were falling, seemingly without cause. Then he realized that the most potent force of all was causing them to fall. It was spring; the sap was beginning to run; the buds were beginning to push from within. From down beneath the dark earth, the roots were taking life and sending it along trunk, branch and twig, until that life expelled every bit of deadness that remained from the previous year. It was, as a great Scottish preacher termed it, ‘the expulsive power of a new affection’” (Hughes). Our new life in Christ should expel the old.

WHAT THE CHURCH IS SUPPOSED TO BE

What is the church supposed to be like? Modern forms extend from humble house churches to mega-churches that operate like businesses.

Paul's Travels

His Embrace “After the uproar had ceased, Paul called the disciples to *himself*, embraced *them*, and departed to go to Macedonia” (20:1). After the commotion at Ephesus, Paul did what he had planned to do (19:21),—he left for Macedonia, where he had sent Timothy and Erastus (19:22). There was a farewell meeting with the disciples, not *his* disciples, the disciples, that is, the disciples of the Lord. Before his departure, he hugged them like you would your family. The church is the family of God. God is our Father. We are brothers and sisters in the Lord.

His Concern “Now when he had gone over that region” (20:2a). After leaving Ephesus, Paul stopped at Troas. Paul speaks of being at Troas in his second letter to the Corinthians. He says, “Furthermore, when I came to Troas to *preach* Christ’s gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord, I had no rest in my spirit, because I did not find Titus, my brother; but taking my leave of them, I departed for Macedonia” (2 Cor. 2:12-13).

What happened at Troas can be pieced together from the letters Paul wrote to the Corinthians. While at Ephesus, Paul talked to members of Chloe’s household about quarrels in the Corinthian Church (1 Cor. 1:11). Perhaps at this point, Paul sent Timothy on a trip that included Corinth (1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10). The New Testament is silent about what happened to Timothy. Perhaps he never made it to Corinth. The fact that Timothy is listed with Paul in 2 Corinthians 1:1 suggests that Timothy only got as far as Macedonia, where Paul caught up with him. In the meantime, a committee arrived from Corinth with questions for Paul (1 Cor. 16:17; 7:1ff.). Thus, Paul wrote the book now called 1 Corinthians to correct disorders including divisions, incest, lawsuits, and fornication and answer questions concerning such subjects as marriage, meats, veils, the Lord’s Table, spiritual gifts, the resurrection, and a collection for the poor saints at Jerusalem. Paul probably commissioned Titus to take 1 Corinthians to Corinth.

At any rate, after Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, he became deeply concerned about how the Corinthians would respond to what he had written (2 Cor. 7:8). He had called them carnal (1 Cor. 3:1) and had said some of them were proud (1 Cor. 4:18). Paul left Ephesus. At Troas, he found an opportunity for the gospel (2 Cor. 2:12), but because he did not find Titus there (2 Cor. 2:12-13) and since he was still eager to hear about the Corinthians, he hastened to Macedonia (2 Cor. 2:13). The superscription in Manuscript B and the Peshitta Harklein, as well as the Coptic Versions, say that 2 Corinthians was written from Philippi. That early tradition is probably correct. There Paul found Titus (2 Cor. 7:6-7). Titus gave Paul a report that was, on the whole, encouraging (2 Cor. 2:14; 7:5-7). The Corinthians had responded properly to 1 Corinthians. They had even disciplined the incestuous member (2 Cor. 2:5-11), although some were critical of Paul.

We should be concerned for the spiritual welfare of believers as we would be for members of our own family. On many occasions, I have arrived at church on Sunday morning concerned about the Sunday morning message and some saint that I know is going through a difficult time.

As Paul passed through Macedonia, which includes Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea, he encouraged the disciples with many words (20:2). Again, from Paul's letter to the Corinthians, Paul's personal experience in Macedonia is known. He says, "For indeed when we came to Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were troubled on every side. Outside *were* conflicts; inside *were* fears. Nevertheless, God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus and not only by his coming but also by the consolation with which he was comforted in you, when he told us of your earnest desire, your mourning, your zeal for me so that I rejoiced even more" (2 Cor. 7:5-7). Paul has been described as a "man with a concerned heart" (Wiersbe).

His Encouragement "And encouraged them with many words" (20:2b). On this trip, he was collecting a "love offering" for the poor saints at Jerusalem, and he was encouraging the saints in Macedonia. It was probably during this time that he went as far as Illyrian (Rom. 15:19; Marshall; etc.).

His Enlightenment Paul arrived in Greece (20:2), that is, Corinth. Luke adds, "He came to Greece and stayed three months" (20:2c-3a). Paul stayed in Corinth for three months. Bruce says this was the winter months of 56-57 AD. While in Corinth, Paul wrote Romans (Marshall).

His Offering "And when the Jews plotted against him as he was about to sail to Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia. And Sopater of Berea accompanied him to Asia; also, Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians, and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy, and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia" (20:3b-4). He planned to sail from Corinth to Syria, but when he discovered that the Jews were plotting against him (18:12-17), he traveled overland back through Macedonia. Barclay says, "On such a ship, it would have been the easiest thing in the world for the fanatical Jews to arrange that Paul should disappear overboard and never be heard of again."

Luke lists seven men who went ahead of Paul and waited for Paul at Troas (20:5). These were probably men from various churches taking the offering to the saints at Jerusalem (Marshall). Four were from Asia and two were from Europe. Sopater is mentioned in Romans 16:21, but Secundus is only mentioned here. Tychicus is mentioned several times (Eph. 6:21; Col. 4:7; 2 Tim. 4:12; Titus 3:12). Trophimus is the man Paul left at Miletus sick (2 Tim. 4:20). As the church at Jerusalem had seven, so did the Gentiles (Rackham). Bruce points out that shortly before leaving Corinth, Paul sent the Roman Christians greetings from "all the churches of Christ" (Rom. 16:16).

"These men, going ahead, waited for us at Troas" (20:5). Luke again uses the pronoun "us." He probably joined Paul in Philippi, where Paul left him (Rackham). Luke was with Paul when he was in Philippi (16:10-17), but did not leave with him (16:40; see Alexander).

"But we sailed away from Philippi after the Days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days joined them at Troas, where we stayed seven days" (20:6). The expression "the Days of Unleavened Bread" is a reference to the week after the Passover. If Paul observed the Jewish feast of Unleavened Bread, it was not as a concession to Jewish custom (Gal. 4:10; Rackham). When Paul traveled from Troas to Philippi, it took two days (16:11). This trip from Philippi took five, probably because of the wind (Alexander; Bruce). The attention to the minute details of chronology is because Luke is once again with Paul (Alexander).

This passage describes Paul's travels but also records and implies some of what the church should be. The church should be like a family, concerned, caring, encouraging, and enlightening one another. Paul embraced the brethren (20:1), encouraged believers (20:2), and collected money for those in need (20:4). The church ought to be like a caring family. We should embrace, encourage, and give.

Paul's Miracle

His Message “Now on the first *day* of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight” (20:7). The custom of the church was to meet on the first day of the week in observance of the Lord's resurrection (Alexander). Rackham calls the statement of this verse “unmistakable evidence” of the observance of Sunday. If Luke is using Jewish reckoning, this meeting was held on Saturday evening (Rackham). If he is using Roman reckoning, it was Sunday night (Marshall). Luke is using the Roman method (Marshall, who points to 3:1).

The purpose of the gathering was to break bread, a reference to the love feast, a meal that included the Lord's Supper (Bruce; see also Marshall). Paul was scheduled to depart on Monday, but he spoke to them in their regular service before he left. The Greek word translated “spoke” means “to converse with, discourse, discuss, argue” (see comments on 17:2). This went on until midnight. Their meetings were not regulated by the clock (Bruce). Paul was long-winded (28:23). The people didn't have to get home to see the Tonight Show. Paul was, no doubt, an engaging speaker. Today the rule is “The head cannot entertain what the seat cannot endure.” John Newton said, “When wariness begins, edification ends.”

This verse gives us a glimpse into the early church. Believers gathered at night on Sunday (20:7). They met at night out of necessity. There was no public observance of either Saturday or Sunday. Business was conducted as usual on both days (Rackham). Believers were involved in a trade, and certainly, slaves were unable to come during the day. Believers gathered to observe the Lord's Table, which was done in the context of a common meal.

Believers gathered for the ministry of the Word. In the upper room, just before He died, Jesus spoke at length at “the Last Supper.”

It is all about the Lord. On the Lord's day, the Lord's people ought to gather to observe the Lord's Table and hear the Lord's Word. Paul preached until midnight! Barclay says, “There is something very lovely about this simple picture. The impression is that of a family meeting together rather than of a modern church service. Is it possible that we have gained dignity in our church services at the expense of the family atmosphere?” Barclay adds, “It may well be that we have lost something of great value in the happy togetherness of the common meal.”

The Miracle “There were many lamps in the upper room where they were gathered together” (20:8). Reporting details of an eyewitness account, Luke says there were many lamps in the upper room where the believers met. The Greek word translated “lamps” means “torches.” The air in the crowded room began to grow heavy with the smoke from the torches (Bruce). The lack of oxygen made for drowsiness (Hughes).

“And in a window sat a certain young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep. He was overcome by sleep; and as Paul continued speaking, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead” (20:9). While Paul was speaking, a young man named Eutychus was sitting in the window, which was a mere opening in the wall (Bruce), without glass. Either lattice or solid wood opened like a door (Barclay). The Greek word translated “young man” here means a man twenty-four to forty years of age (Wiersbe), but the one translated “young man” in verse 12 describes someone 8-14 years old (Marshall). Since the Greek word translated “young man” in verse 12 can also mean “servant,” Eutychus was probably at least in his twenties (see Wiersbe). Perhaps from a hard day's work (Barclay), the stuffy atmosphere (Bruce), or the lateness of the hour, Eutychus dozed off and fell three stories out of the window to his death.

Again, Paul did what Peter did (9:36-41). For the Greek word rendered “speaking,” see the comments on Acts 17:2.

Eutychus was the first to fall asleep in church, but not the last. All pastors have experienced people falling asleep while they were preaching. One tells of an associate who was sitting on the platform while he was speaking. The poor fellow dozed off and dropped his hymnal (Hughes). There are numerous stories about an elder or a deacon who fell asleep in the service, and when his wife nudged him, he immediately stood up and pronounced his benediction!

“But Paul went down, fell on him, and embracing *him* said, ‘Do not trouble yourselves, for his life is in him’” (20:10). Falling on Eutychus in the fashion of Elijah (1 Kings 17:21) and Elisha (2 Kings 4:34), Paul told the crowd not to be troubled and He raised Eutychus from the dead. The Greek word translated “trouble” means “to make a noise or uproar.” It was used of ostentatious lamentation (A-S). “They began to scream in an uncontrolled eastern way” (Barclay). Paul was exhorting them to keep silent or to be quiet (Alexander).

“Now when he had come up, had broken bread and eaten, and talked a long while, even till daybreak, he departed” (20:11). After the incident with Eutychus, Paul broke bread with them, that is, he observed the Lord’s Table with them (Rackham; Bruce; but Alexander thinks this verse is a reference to an early breakfast; see also Wiersbe) and shared a fellowship meal with them (“eaten” is used in 10:10 of a meal).

The Greek word translated “talked” means “to be in company with,” hence, “converse with.” Alexander says that although it denotes “familiar conversation, as distinguished from the more formal or elaborate discourse, it was later applied to formal discourse, and it is the Greek word from which we get the English words “homily” and “homiletics.” Paul departed from the city (Alexander).

“And they brought the young man in alive, and they were not a little comforted” (20:12). Luke adds that they brought Eutychus in alive and comforted the crowd of believers. Apparently, his friends had taken Eutychus home, and he returned to the meeting (Rackham). Alexander explains that “not a little” is a figure of speech called a litotes, a negative expression conveying a “very positive idea.”

This part of the passage describes Paul instructing God’s children and meeting the needs of one who was hurting. The church ought to be like a caring family that gathers together, instructs, and meets the needs of the hurting.

“The fear is often, ‘If you really knew me, you wouldn’t want to be with me, so I have to create a facade of who I want you to think I am that is more lovable and acceptable than who I really am.’ When people hide their fears behind a mask, they tend to feel even more lonely, no matter what happens. If they don’t receive love and respect, then they lose. Even if they do feel loved and respected, they often can’t enjoy it because they know it’s only for part of them. One patient told me, ‘They don’t love me; they love this image of me. If they really knew what I was like, if they knew my dark side, then they’d be out of here.’ They may become vigilant to hide those parts that they think are unlovable, which can be enormously stressful” (Ornish, *LAS*, p. 121). “The value of a stable community, neighborhood, and extended family is that people know you. They know your secrets” (Ornish, *LAS*, p. 121).

Paul’s Travels

“Then we went ahead to the ship and sailed to Assos, there intending to take Paul on board; for so he had given orders, intending himself to go on foot” (20:13). Luke (“we”) and the others

(20:6) went ahead of Paul and sailed to Assos. Paul went overland to Assos, a distance of twenty miles (Rackham; Bruce), which he could probably walk in 10 hours or less (Wiersbe). Perhaps, like Elijah, and even the Lord, He wanted to be alone (Rackham).

“And when he met us at Assos, we took him on board and came to Mitylene” (20:14). At Assos, Paul joined them and they all sailed to Mitylene, the chief city of the island of Lesbos (Bruce), forty-four miles to the south (Marshall).

“We sailed from there, and the next *day* came opposite Chios. The following *day* we arrived at Samos and stayed at Trogyllium. The next *day* we came to Miletus” (20:15). The next day, they sail to Chios and the day after that, they sailed to the island of Samos and stayed at Trogyllium. Either the wind fell, or it was too late to navigate the strait in the dark (Bruce), so they anchored for the night. Finally, on the following day, they arrived at Miletus, thirty miles south of Ephesus (Marshall).

“For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he would not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the Day of Pentecost” (20:16). Because Paul was eager to get to Jerusalem in time for the Pentecost, he decided not to spend time in Ephesus. In 57 AD, Pentecost fell on May 29 (Bruce).

Here, Paul is pictured alone by design. The church ought to be like a family, yet the family members need alone time with the Lord.

Summary: The church ought to be like a family, concerned, encouraging, enlightening, caring, and comforting one another.

The passage is about Paul, but he is an example. As he embraces the brethren (20:1), encourages believers (20:2), collects money for those in need (20:4), meets with and instructs (20:7), and yet spends time alone with the Lord (20:13), so the church family should do likewise.

What the church should be and what the church is are often two different things. Instead of being awake and alert, like Eutychus, many are asleep, not physically, but mentally and spiritually. They sit in church awake physically, but mentally, they are somewhere else. Spiritually, as things are concerned, they are asleep. They are in a comatose state. They are more awake watching TV, closing a business deal, or shopping at the mall.

Martin Luther tells of a dream he had of Satan sitting on the throne, listening to his agent's reports of the progress they had made in opposing Christianity. One demon said, “There was a company of Christians crossing the desert. I loosed a lion on them, and soon the sands of the desert were strewn with their corps.” “So what?” answers Satan. “The lion destroyed their bodies. It is their souls I'm after.” Another reported, “There was a company of Christian pilgrims sailing on a ship. I sent a great wind against the ship and drove the ship on the rocks, and every Christian aboard the ship was drown.” “So what?” said Satan. “Their bodies were drowned of the sea, but the souls were saved. It is their souls that I'm after.” The third came forward, saying, “For ten years, I've been trying to cast a Christian into a deep sleep. At last, I have succeeded.” And with that, the coroners of Hell rang with shouts of magnificent triumph!

PAUL'S MESSAGE TO LEADERS

The title, "Paul's Message to Leaders," may sound like it does not apply to you, but it does. The most successful leader in all of church history is Paul. What did he have to say to leaders about leadership?

Paul's Example

The Assembly "From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church" (20:17). Stopping briefly at Miletus on his way to Jerusalem, Paul called for the elders of the church at Ephesus to come to him for a conference. Elders are the leaders of the church. In the New Testament, the words "elder" and "bishop" are used interchangeably (Titus 1:5, 7). The Greek word translated "elder" means "elder" in the sense of old age or "elder" in the sense of dignity, rank, or office (A-S). The Greek word rendered "bishop" means "superintendent, guardian, overseer" (20:28). In this passage, Paul tells the elders/bishops to shepherd (20:28) the flock. The Greek word translated "shepherd" means "to tend, shepherd, govern."

Rackham says their title indicates the function of the elders. They exercise oversight, which is further defined as attending the flock. He also points out that rulers, such as kings, were called shepherds in the Old Testament, and the word "tend" became a synonym for "rule." He adds that shepherds lead by example, that is, by "going before them," and they protect the flock against wolves by warning against false doctrine.

The Practice "And when they had come to him, he said to them: "You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you" (20:18). Paul begins by appealing to their personal experience with him to verify his example before them from the first day he met them. He has recently had to deal with various "malignant charges" (Alexander) hurled at him at Corinth (2 Cor. 10-13), not to mention having fought with beasts at Ephesus (1 Cor. 15:32).

"serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews" (20:19). Specifically, Paul's manner among them was to serve the Lord with humility, even while experiencing trials. Marshall says, "The first characteristic of his ministry which is singled out for mention is *humility*, the refusal to claim anything for himself (2 Cor. 10:1; 11:7; 1 Thess. 2:6). The second is the *tears* which expressed his personal concern for his converts (Rom. 9:2; 2 Cor. 2:4; Phil. 3:18), and the third is the implied patience and fortitude with which he continued his work despite the temptations to give it up that arose from Jewish persecution (2 Cor. 11:24, 26; 1 Thess. 2:14-16)." Wiersbe points out that Paul was interested in serving the Lord (20:19), not in making money (20:33) or enjoying an easier life (20:34-35). Paul needed to defend himself because attacks on him were designed to stop the gospel (Alexander).

Instead of pride (ego), making money, or seeking a life of ease, Paul was humble before the Lord, concerned about people, and endured trials.

His Preaching "How I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house" (20:20). Concerning his ministry, Paul reminds them that he was neither negligent (Alexander) in public places or in homes to inform them

about anything that might be profitable to them (20:27), even though it might have been unwelcome (Gal. 4:16; 2 Cor. 4:2; Marshall). Paul taught publicly in the synagogue, in the school of Tyrannus, and in private gatherings in homes (Rackham). The Greek word translated “proclaimed” means “report, announce, declare,” and the one rendered “taught” is the one usually used for teaching. In the next verse, Paul uses the word “testify” to describe his ministry.

“testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (20:21). In his ministry to both Jews and Greeks, Paul delivered the message of repentance and faith. The Greek word rendered “repentance” means “to change one’s mind.” In this case, it is changing one’s mind about God (Constable), that is, “with respect to God” (Alexander). Faith, which is “belief or trust” (Alexander), is in Jesus Christ. Toussaint says, “In the Greek text, the words repent and faith are joined together by one article. This may imply that these two words stress two aspects of trust in Christ (2:38). When a person places his faith in Christ, he is then turning from (repenting of) his former unbelief (Toussaint, *Bible Knowledge Commentary*).

This is one of only three places in the New Testament where repentance and faith appear together. The other two are Mark 1:15 and Hebrews 6:1. In the Greek text of Acts 20:21, one article unites both repentance and faith. The meaning is that Paul called both Jews and Gentiles to change their thinking about and have faith in God and the Lord Jesus Christ (Wilkin, pp. 90-91; Wilkin points out that in the Majority Text, there is a second article, but it functions as a pronoun.). Hence, repentance and faith cannot be separated; they are inseparable but can be distinguished.

Salvation is simply changing your mind about what you were trusting to get to heaven and trusting Jesus Christ. It does not depend on anything we do. A man went through such agonizing sorrow for sin he lost 30 pounds. He then concluded that everyone must undergo a similar experience to be saved. Upon hearing the story, someone responded, “If you have to suffer, how do you know when your suffering is sufficient? Would losing 20 pounds be sufficient?” (*Our Daily Bread*, 6/27/1980).

His Prediction “And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there” (20:22). Paul continues explaining that he is now going to Jerusalem “bound in the spirit.” Bound in the Spirit has been taken to mean restraint by the Holy Spirit from knowing exactly what was going to happen (Alexander; Rackham).

“Except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me” (20:23). What Paul did know was that in every city he had been to recently, the Holy Spirit testified through prophets (Rackham; Bruce; Toussaint) that he would be arrested and experience trouble.

“But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God” (20:24). That information, of course, did not dissuade him from going to Jerusalem because his concern was not self-preservation. It was to finish his life with joy and with the ministry of testifying the gospel of God’s grace. The gospel of the grace of God is the good news he received from the Lord (Gal. 1:11-12; Alexander says it was at his conversion) that because Jesus died and rose from the dead (1 Cor. 15:1-8), salvation is by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8-9).

“And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more” (20:25). Given what he anticipated is going to happen to him, he expects he will never again see those to whom he has proclaimed the kingdom of God. Given the

reference to Paul's preaching the gospel of the grace of God (20:24), many commentators assume that the kingdom of God here is the same as preaching the gospel "equated with preaching the kingdom" (Constable). The two expressions, "preaching the gospel of the grace of God" and "preaching of the kingdom of God," are used interchangeably (Pentecost; cited by Constable). "The gospel involves a kingdom" (Rackham). Bruce says it is fruitless to distinguish between proclaiming the kingdom and proclaiming the good news of God's grace.

Kelly distinguishes between the two (Kelly, cited by Bruce). Toussaint says the gospel of the grace of God and the kingdom are related in that grace enables believers to have both the privileged of salvation and of entering the millennial. Barnes says Paul made known "the nature of the reign of God on earth by the Messiah" (Barnes). MacDonald says Paul not only instructed them in the fundamentals of the gospel but also in all the truths that were vital for godly living (MacDonald). In other words, the mention of "the whole counsel of God" (20:27) indicates Paul preached the gospel of the grace of God and that faithful believers would be rewarded in the future kingdom on the earth when the Lord returns ("inheritance" in 20:32).

Paul predicted that he was headed for trouble but was not moved. He did not say, "None of these things hurt me, or none of these things might hinder me." He was going to Jerusalem whether he had trouble or not because he knew the Lord would be with him. On a family trip, a little girl fell asleep. When she woke up, her father asked, "Do you know where we're going?" her answer was, "No," but I'm going with you, and it's all right."

His Position "Therefore, I testify to you this day that I *am* innocent of the blood of all men" (20:26). At any rate, Paul concludes with the testimony that he is innocent of the blood of all man, an obvious allusion to Ezekiel (Ezek. 3:18, 20). As a watchman who is faithful to warn, he is not guilty of the destruction of people who do not listen, so Paul has been faithful in his ministry and is not responsible if any who have heard him are destroyed.

"For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God" (20:27). As he explains ("for"), he has not held back anything (20:20) but has announced (20:20) the whole counsel of God, including the gospel (20:24) and the kingdom (20:25). The Greek word translated "counsel" means "counsel, purpose." Alexander said that it refers to the plan or will of God.

McGee said, "As I write this, I am a retired preacher. I have made many blunders and have failed in many ways. But as I look back on my ministry, I can say truthfully that when I stood in the pulpit, I declared the Word of God as I saw it. I have the deep satisfaction of knowing that if I went back to any pulpit which I have held, I haven't a thing to add to what I have already said. I don't mean I couldn't say it in a better way, but the important thing is that I declared the whole counsel of God. I have always believed that the important issue is to get out the entire Word of God" (McGee, vol. 4, p. 604).

Paul was an example of commitment to people and to the ministry of the Word. His commitment was not like the young man who wrote, "My dearest sweetheart, I would climb the highest mountain, swim the widest stream, cross-burning desert, die at stake for you. PS I'll see you Saturday if it doesn't rain.

Paul's Exhortation

Exhortation "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (20:28). Paul concludes ("therefore") that since they have been instructed in the whole plan and purpose of God, they should take heed to themselves (1 Tim. 4:16) and to all the flock.

The Greek word translated ‘take heed’ means “to turn to, to turn one’s mind to, attend to, give heed” (5:35; 8:6; 10, 11; 16:14). Alexander says it denotes not mere attention, but attention, sedulous, and anxious care. Leaders and laymen alike sometimes practice pitchfork religion. They pitch the hay over their shoulder to someone else. We must first take heed to ourselves.

The Holy Spirit made them overseers either by expressing designation (13:2) or by directing the choice of others (14:23). Bruce seems to favor the view that their commission was received through prophetic utterance. They were to shepherd the flock. As already mentioned, the Greek word translated “shepherd” means “to tend, shepherd, govern.”

Greek manuscripts differ over the reading “church of God.” The *Textus Receptus* (Ⲙ and B) read the “church of God.” The majority of Greek manuscripts, however, read “Lord and God: or “Lord and the God.” Those who take the reading “the church of God” say Christ, whose blood was shared, is God (Rackham).

God purchased the church with His own blood. The Greek word translated “purchased” means “to get redeemed for oneself, get possession.” The noun form of this verb means “acquisition, obtaining, possession.” Rackham says that in the first part of Acts, the crucifixion was given as an essential element of the apostolic testimony. Here, the underlying doctrine of the crucifixion, namely, the doctrine of the atonement, is asserted. He also says the metaphor of “purchase” should not be pressed too far by asking to whom the price was paid. In fact, the idea of buying is not necessarily contained in the Greek word, which simply denotes “acquiring” or “getting for one’s own.” Marshall says the thought is that through the act of redemption, the church became God’s special property, and this is based on the picture of God redeeming Israel in Isaiah 43:21.

Wiersbe says, “Never underestimate the great importance of the church. The church is important to God the Father because His name is upon it—the church of God.’ It is important to the Son because He shed His blood for it; and is important to the Holy Spirit because He is calling and equipping people to minister to the church.”

Explanation “For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock” (20:29). The reason (“for”) for taking heed to themselves and the flock is that savage wolves will come from outside the flock (20:30) to destroy the flock. The Greek word translated “savage” means “heavy, burdensome, severe, violent, cruel.” Not sparing the flock is a litote for destruction (Alexander). Wolves, false teachers, will find their way into the flock in sheep’s clothing (Rackham).

In Paul’s day, the wolves were Judaizers who taught people must keep the Law. I have seen people destroyed by antichristian material they read on the internet.

“Also, from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves” (20:30). Besides those coming from outside the congregation (20:29), there will come some from within the elders or the congregation, who will speak perverse things. The Greek word translated “perverse” means “distort, twist, pervert.” Both Jesus and Paul speak of a perverse generation (Lk. 9:41; Phil. 2:15). These from the inside will not only teach error, they will rend the church by divisions, forming parties (Alexander) and “dragging” disciples away to form parties after their name (Rackham). There are dangers from within the congregation because some, like Diotrefes, who loved to have preeminence, are ambitious for position and power (3 Jn. 9-11). After Paul’s departure, the church at Ephesus was troubled by false teaching (1 Tim.; 2 Tim.; 1 Jn.; see esp. 2 Tim. 1:15). Later the church at Ephesus tested those who said they are apostles and were not, and have found them liars” (Rev. 2:2).

“Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears” (20:31). Paul concludes that the elders should watch. The Greek word translated “watch” means “to be awake,” but is used figuratively of “watching.” While they watch, they are to remember Paul’s example. For three years, he constantly (“day and night”) warned them with tears (2 Cor. 2:4; Phil. 3:18). The Greek word translated “warn” means “to put in mind, exhort, admonish.” It includes the ideas of instructing and reminding (Alexander). Alexander thinks “tears” is hyperbole, for his ministry was not a cold, heartless exhibition of truth, but he warned them being animated by tender affection toward them. Someone has said, “If you can’t put fire into your message, perhaps you should put your message into the fire!”

“So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (20:32). Alexander suggests that “now” indicates a third attempt to conclude (20:22; 20:25). The Greek word translated “commend” means “to deposit, commit.” Paul commits them to God and His message of grace that is able to build them up to maturity (Marshall) so that they will have an inheritance among those who are set apart to the Lord. Rackham says the inheritance will only be fully realized in the future. Marshall says this obscure phrase, which is perhaps based on Deuteronomy 33:3 ff., “appears to refer God’s gift of a share in the blessings and His kingly rule, which Paul’s hearers will enjoy along with God’s people as a whole. It is significant that the blessings come to commitment to the word.”

Paul’s Example “I have coveted no one’s silver or gold or apparel” (20:33). Once again, Paul reminds them of his example; he coveted no one’s silver, gold, or apparel. In the ancient world, clothing was a form of wealth. Fashion seldom changed and sons inherited the apparel of their fathers.

“Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me” (20:34). Paul also reminds them that they were well aware of the fact that he worked to meet his needs and even those who were with him. Preachers of the gospel are entitled to support (1 Cor. 9:11-15), but Paul refused to get support from the churches where he worked.

“I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’” (20:35). By working, Paul not only had money to support himself and those who were with him; he also had money to give to those in need. Supporting the weak includes those who are sick in body, scrupulous in my mind, and sinful in spirit. Paul urges them to remember that Jesus said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive,” a statement of Jesus nowhere else recorded (Jn. 21:25). Barclay says there are two main objectives in work: personal independence and the ability to give generously.

Dr. Earl V. Pierce used to call this “the supreme beatitude” because, unlike the other beatitudes, it tells us how to be *more* blessed! (Pierce, cited by Wiersbe). Wiersbe says, “This beatitude does not suggest that people who receive are “less blessed” than people who give (the beggar in Acts 3 would argue about that). It could be paraphrased, ‘It’s better to share with others than to keep what you have and collect more.’ In other words, the blessing does not come from accumulating wealth but from sharing it. After all, Jesus became poor so that we might become rich (2 Cor. 8:9). One of the best commentaries on this statement is Luke 12:16-31.”

Paul exhorted the elders to give themselves to the ministry of others and reminded them that giving is more blessed than receiving. When you get a piece of the pie, you eat it, and that’s the end of it. When you give a piece of the pie, the satisfaction lasts long.

Paul's Exit

Praying “And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all” (20:36). After he was done speaking, Paul knelt to pray for them. The mention of kneeling seems to imply that kneeling was not his customary position in public prayer (Alexander).

Sorrowing “Then they all wept freely, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spoke, that they would see his face no more” (20:37). The response of the elders to Paul's speech and departure was to weep openly, embrace him and kiss him. Kissing was the usual form of salutation, especially between teacher and disciple (Rackham). Paul's statement that he would never see them again on this side of heaven brought the most sorrow to them.

Accompanying “And they accompanied him to the ship” (20:38). As a body, the elders escorted Paul to the ship (Rackham). With their hearts filled with grief and their eyes filled with tears (Bruce), they bid their leaders and mentor a sorrowful farewell.

Summary: Paul gave himself to the ministry of the Word and to people and he exhorted the elders to do the same because of the threat from without and from within, and because it is more blessed to give than receive.

Wiersbe lists five sins that are destructive to ministry: carelessness (20:31), shallowness (20:32), covetousness (20:33), laziness (20:34), and selfishness (20:35). Perhaps the essence of this passage is that it is more blessed to give than to receive. Paul gave himself to the Lord, God's people, and the ministry of the Word. His giving was so intense, he forgot himself. Instead of just being go-getters, we need to be go-givers.

We think of blessings in terms of what we have received. If you own just one Bible, you are abundantly blessed. One-third of the world does not have access to even one. If you woke up with more health than illness this morning, you are more blessed than the millions who will not survive this week. Suppose you have never experienced the danger of battle, the loneliness of imprisonment, the agony of torture, or the pangs of starvation. In that case, you are ahead of 500 million people in the world. If you can attend a church meeting without fear of harassment, arrest, torture, or death, you are more blessed than three billion people in the world. If you have food in the refrigerator, clothes on your back, a roof overhead, and a place to sleep, you are richer than 75% of this world. If you have money in the bank, in your wallet, and spare change in a dish somewhere, you are among the top 8% of the world's wealth.

It is more blessed to give. You will be more blessed in time and eternity.

THE TRIP TO TROUBLE

If life is a journey, it is a trip to trouble. Job said that “man is born to trouble” (Job 5:7) and “Man *who is* born of woman is of few days and full of trouble” (Job 14:1). Paul taught, “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).

Some think that if they experience trouble, they have done something wrong. They are, at least, out of the will of God. There is a story in the Bible about a man who chose to take a trip, knowing that he was headed for trouble. How does that relate to the will of God? Did he know what he was doing? Was he right? What can we learn from his decisions about trouble in our lives?

Tyre: Pressure from People

The Trip “Now it came to pass, that when we had departed from them and set sail, running a straight course we came to Cos, the following *day* to Rhodes, and from there to Patara and finding a ship sailing over to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail” (21:1-2). Paul and his party, including Luke (“we”), departed from Ephesus. The Greek word translated “departed” means “to draw away, to tear away.” It suggests something more than simply parting. They were “reluctantly torn away from the Ephesians” (Rackham). Luke describes in detail the trip aboard the ship from Miletus (20:17) to Phoenicia. The detail and exactness are indications an eyewitness wrote this account. The nautical terminology shows it was written by someone familiar with the sea, though not a seaman by profession (Alexander).

Their journey was from Miletus (20:17) to Cos to Rhodes to Patara, a “local coastal” trip stopping at every port and lasting three days (Wiersbe). By the way, Cos was famous because it was the home of the medical school founded by Hippocrates in the 5th century BC (Bruce). At Patara, they found a ship bound directly to Phoenicia, a distance of 400 miles that, with a favorable wind, would take three or four days (Rackham; Marshall).

“When we had sighted Cyprus, we passed it on the left, sailed to Syria, and landed at Tyre; for there the ship was to unload her cargo” (21:3). From Phoenicia, they sailed past Cyprus, where Paul had been on his first missionary journey (13:5-6), to Tyre. At Tyre, the ship had to unload, allowing Paul to visit the believers at Tyre. Chrysostom said the voyage from Patara to Tyre took five days (Bruce). Paul was headed to Jerusalem—in the will of God (19:21). Like his master, he set his face toward Jerusalem (Lk. 9:31). Luke does not mention that Paul was bearing gifts, but that was a major reason for going to Jerusalem (Rom. 15:25-33). He also knew he was on a trip to trouble (20:22). You need to understand that life’s journey is a trip to trouble.

The Prophecy “And finding disciples, we stayed there seven days. They told Paul through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem” (21:4). Because the ship took a long time to unload its cargo, they spent seven days in Tyre (Alexander). While waiting for the ship to continue its voyage, Paul looked for believers. He found them and surely there was an instant rapport. Since believers are all members of the body of Christ, they feel an immediate connection, although they may have never met before. Under the influence and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, it was revealed that Paul would be in great danger in Jerusalem. As a result of the revelation given by the Holy Spirit, the believers at Tyre concluded that Paul should not go to Jerusalem (Marshall). This does

not mean that the Holy Spirit was telling Paul not to go to Jerusalem. This was not a divine command, only a revelation.

The Pressure “When we had come to the end of those days, we departed and went on our way; and they all accompanied us, with wives and children, till we were out of the city. And we knelt down on the shore and prayed” (21:5). The expression “to the end of days” points to “a time they might not exceed” (Rackham). When their involuntary stay at Tyre ended, the believers escorted Paul and his party to the ship. On the shore, in sight of the ship, they all prayed for Paul and his trip to Jerusalem with an affectionate farewell. Hughes imagines them praying something like, “Lord, we thank you for bringing Paul to us. He has ministered to us mightily. We believe that you want him to stay here a while longer. Keep him safe as he goes on his way. We all have our faults, Lord. Override the apostle’s wrong decision.”

It’s amazing how some believers are so quick to know God’s will for someone else. That may be true in some cases, but in others, well-meaning believers try to make God’s will conform to their preconceived ideas. Their reasoning might have been, “If Paul goes to Jerusalem, he’s going to suffer, and he will be deprived of his ministry. This cannot be God’s will” (Hughes). That may not have happened in Paul’s case, but that is the kind of thinking that often goes on today because believers are so affected by the thinking of American culture. Herbert Hendin says, “It is no accident that, at present, the dominant trends in psychoanalysis are the rediscovery of narcissism. The society is marked by self-interest and ego-centrism that increasingly reduces all relations to the question, ‘What am I getting out of it?’” (Hendin, cited by Hughes). This spills over into the church with reasoning like “God wants me to be happy. If I’m not happy, I’m not in His will.” Or “God wants does not want me to suffer pain. I am in pain. Therefore, I’m not in God’s will” (Hughes).

The Persistence “When we had taken our leave of one another, we boarded the ship, and they returned home” (21:6). Luke notes that they boarded the ship and the believers of Tyre returned to their homes. These unimportant details again indicate an eyewitness account (Alexander). Paul continued the trip because he was convinced that he was in the will of God. Oswald Chambers says, “To choose to suffer means that there is something wrong; to choose God’s will, even if it means suffering, is very different. No healthy saint ever chooses to suffer; he chooses God’s will as Jesus did, whether it means suffering or not” (Oswald Chambers, cited by Hughes).

Pressure from people should not prevent us from pursuing the will of God. People who try to persuade us not to pursue the will of God have a perspective that is more horizontal than vertical; it is more temporal than eternal. Paul was not a people pleaser (Gal. 1:10).

Caesarea: Persistence by Paul

Philip “And when we had finished our voyage from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, greeted the brethren, and stayed with them one day” (21:7). Having finished the voyage portion of the trip, they spent a day with the believers of Ptolemais, which was just north of Mount Carmel (Alexander). The 40-mile trip from Tyre to Ptolemais was a single day’s journey (Marshall).

“On the next day we who were Paul’s companions departed and came to Caesarea, and entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him” (21:8). The next day they journey overland 40 miles to Caesarea (Marshall), where they spent many days (21:10) in the home of Philip. Philip was one of the original seven in Jerusalem chosen to distribute money to the widows (Acts 6:1-6). As a result of the persecution that arose after the death of Steven, he was one of those who were scattered abroad (8:1). He preached to

the Samaritans and the Ethiopian (8:5-40). Twenty years before this occasion, Philip settled in Caesarea (8:40; Rackham; Bruce).

“Now this man had four virgin daughters who prophesied” (21:9). Philip had four daughters who never got married and who prophesied. Perhaps the prophecy was something similar to what had been prophesied before at Tyre (20:4), which would explain the mention of them prophesying (Alexander; Rackham). Alexander says some claim these were the first Nuns!

Agabus “And as we stayed many days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea” (21:10). During their stay in Caesarea, Agabus came from Judea, which may denote Jerusalem (Alexander). This Agabus is probably the same one who prophesied concerning the famine in Jerusalem (11:27-30), which was the occasion of Paul’s first official visit to Jerusalem (Alexander). That was ten years before this (Rackham; Wiersbe says it was fifteen years before).

“When he had come to us, he took Paul’s belt, bound his *own* hands and feet, and said, ‘Thus says the Holy Spirit, ‘So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver *him* into the hands of the Gentiles’” (21:11). The Critical Text contains a reading that indicates Agabus bound Paul’s hand and feet. The Traditional Text is ambiguous (see Alexander for details). It could mean either Paul or Agabus (Alexander) was bound. Using Paul’s belt, Agabus bound his hands and feet, telling Paul that the Holy Spirit had revealed to him that the Jews at Jerusalem would bind him and deliver him to the Gentiles. He did not tell Paul not to go; he only told him what would happen when he did.

The Disciples “Now when we heard these things, both we and those from that place pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem” (21:12). In light of what Agabus prophesied, the people present, including Luke (“we”), pleaded with Paul not to go to Jerusalem. Their concern over the danger prompted their request, but they were not acquainted with God’s will (Alexander).

Paul “Then Paul answered, ‘What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus’” (21:13). The Greek word translated “breaking” means “to break in pieces, crush.” In the New Testament, it only occurs here. Their pleas crushed his heart to pieces (Rackham). “It is hard for a man to make a sacrifice which is going to be unpleasant for himself; it is even harder when the people whom he loves are going to be hurt by his actions and plead with him to act differently” (Marshall). Their passion did not persuade Paul, who was convinced it was the will of God to go to Jerusalem (Rackham). He was willing to die for the Lord. “Instead of accusing Paul of compromise, we ought to applaud him for his courage (Wiersbe).

“So when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, ‘The will of the Lord be done’” (21:14). When they saw their pleas had not persuaded Paul, they stopped pressuring him, conceding that God’s will was what needed to be done (Gethsemane, Lk. 22:42). Paul was determined to go to Jerusalem because he was convinced it was the will of God. Richard Baxter said, “Lord, what you will, where you will, and when you will.”

Polycarp (69-155), a church father, was imprisoned because of his faith in Christ. When the proconsul told him to deny his faith, Polycarp answered, “For 86 years I have served Him, and He has never wronged me. How can I blaspheme my King, who has saved me?” The proconsul threatened to cast him in with the wild beasts, but Polycarp answered, “Call them!” He was then warned that he might be burned at the stake. Even that failed to move him. He responded, “You threaten me with fire which burns only for a moment, but you are ignorant of the fire of eternal punishment, reserved for the ungodly.” Polycarp’s final words were: “O Father of Your beloved and blessed Son, Jesus Christ! I bless You that You have counted me worthy of this day, and this hour, to receive my portion in the number of the martyrs, in the cup of Christ.”

Summary: Paul was determined to go to Jerusalem even though he knew it would involve trouble and even in the face of pressure from people because he was convinced it was in the will of God. Commitment to the will of God will enable you to withstand trouble and pressure from people.

We think, “I will do the will of God if it is comfortable. I will do it just as long as there is no trouble.” Or “I will do the will of God if it is convenient. I will do it just as long as there is no pressure from people.” We should say, “I will do the will of God because I am committed.”

God’s will for you may not have been what you would have chosen. You may not even like the sport at the moment, like the little girl who wrote an honest thank-you note: “Thank you for your present. I always wanted a pincushion, but not very much.”

“On April 14, 1521, Martin Luther was on his way to the Diet of Worms. The emperor had forbidden the sale of all the reformer’s books and ordered them to be seized. Luther’s life was in great danger. Luther’s devoted friend and confidant, George Spalatin, had sent word through a special messenger not to come to Worms lest he suffer the same fate as John Hus. Luther comforted his fearful friends, saying, ‘Though Hus was burned, the truth was not burned, and Christ still lives.’ Then he sent Spalatin the now-famous message, ‘I shall go to Worms, though there were as many devils as tiles on the roofs.’

“After an exchange between the Archbishop of Trier, Johann Eck, and Martin Luther, the Augustinian monk, overwhelmed by the immensity of what he was doing, requested and received the night for prayer and consideration. We can be sure Luther really prayed that night. ‘How frail and sensitive is the flesh of men, and the devil so powerful and active through his apostles and the wise of the world! ... O Thou, my God, my God, help me against the reason and wisdom of all the world! Do this! Thou must do it, Thou alone! For this cause is not mine but Thine. For myself, I have no business here with these great lords of the world. Indeed, I, too, desire to enjoy days of peace and quiet and to be undisturbed. But Thine, O Lord, is this cause. And it is righteous and of eternal importance. Stand by me, Thou faithful, eternal God! I rely on no man.... O God, stand by me in the name of Thy dear Son, Jesus Christ, who shall be my Protector and Defender, yea, my mighty Fortress, through the might and strengthening of Thy Holy Spirit.’

“On April 18, a large hall was chosen but was so crowded that scarcely any save the emperor could sit down. Finally came this famous dialogue: ‘ECK: Martin, how can you assume that you are the only one to understand the sense of Scripture? Would you put your judgment above that of so many famous men and claim that you know more than they all? You have no right to call into question the most holy orthodox faith, instituted by Christ the perfect lawgiver, proclaimed throughout the world by the apostles, sealed by the red blood of the martyrs, confirmed by the sacred councils, defined by the Church in which all our fathers believed until death and gave to us as an inheritance, and which now we are forbidden by the pope and emperor to discuss lest there be no end of debate. I ask you, Martin—answer candidly and without horns—do you or do you not repudiate your books and the errors which they contain?’

“LUTHER: Since then, Your Majesty and your lordships desire a simple reply, I will answer without horns and without teeth. Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason—I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other—my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen” (source unknown).

TROUBLE TOWN

Paul was repeatedly warned that if he went to Jerusalem, he was headed for trouble. For him, Jerusalem was trouble town. Like Paul, we are headed for trials and even trouble. What can we learn from his experience?

The Rumor

The Trip “And after those days we packed and went up to Jerusalem” (21:15). After many days in Caesarea (21:8, 10), they went to Jerusalem. Rackham points out that from here to the end of the book, there is one long section without a break, which is disproportionate to the book as a whole. It is a quarter of the book, and from Acts 19:21 to the end, it is a third of the book.

“Also, some of the disciples from Caesarea went with us and brought with them a certain Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple, with whom we were to lodge” (21:16). Some of the disciples from Caesarea as well as a man from Cyprus named Mnason, accompanied Paul to Jerusalem, a distance of between 60 and 70 miles (Rackham; Bruce and Marshall say it was 64 miles.). At Jerusalem, they were to stay with Mnason. Mnason is described as being “an early disciple.” It is possible he was a disciple of the Lord himself, one of the 120 of Acts 1:15 (Rackham), or one of the converts on the day of Pentecost. It is also possible he was one of the Cyprians by whom the Gospel was preached in Antioch (11:19-20; see Alexander; Marshall).

The Brethren “And when we had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly” (21:17). The believers who met Paul and his party on the day they arrived, not necessarily the whole church (Alexander), gladly welcomed them to Jerusalem. Barclay says, “One of the great privileges of belonging to the Church is the fact that no matter where a man goes, he is sure to find a community of like-minded people into which he may enter. The man who is in the family of the Church has friends all over the world.”

The Elders “On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present” (21:18). The day after his arrival, Paul met with James (12:17; 15:13) and the elders of the church at Jerusalem. James was James the Just, the half-brother of Jesus and a man famous for his piety. Eusebius said his knees were like camels because of all his prayer time.

“When he had greeted them, he told in detail those things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry” (21:19). After greeting them “in words of kindness and respect” (Alexander), Paul told James and the elders what God had done through his ministry to the Gentiles (14:27; 15:3 ff., 15:12; and possibly 18:22). This was not a vague or general account (Alexander). He told them about the large number of Gentiles who had come to Christ, including the riot at Ephesus, the opportunity in Athens, and the church at Corinth. Luke does not mention that it was at this time that Paul presented the offering for the poor saints at Jerusalem (Rom. 15:25-31).

The Problem “And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord. And they said to him, “You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law” (21:20). When James and the elders heard what Paul had to say, they glorified the Lord, that is, they acknowledged it to be in truth the work of God (Alexander). “They ratified again the concessions made to the Gentile believers” (Rackham). James and the elders then told Paul that

there were “many myriads of Jews” who were believers, but they were still zealous for the Mosaic Law. The expression “many myriads of Jews” means an innumerable number, not to be defined by a specific number, to convey the idea of a large number (Alexander).

“but they have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise *their* children nor to walk according to the customs” (21:21). These Jewish believers in Jerusalem had been informed that Paul taught Jews living outside Jerusalem among the Gentiles to forsake the Mosaic Law. More specifically, it was rumored that Paul told them not to circumcise the children or to keep the Mosaic customs. The Greek word translated “forsake” means “defection, apostasy, revolt.” James and the elders considered these rumors false (Bruce).

Paul did teach that both Jews and Gentiles are saved by faith apart from keeping the Mosaic Law, including circumcision and the Mosaic customs (Gal. 3:6-11; 4:9-11; 5:3). At the same time, as far as Paul was concerned, circumcision was a manner of indifference (Gal. 5:6; 6:15). He taught that as long as the issue was not eternal salvation, believers were free to do some of the things in the Law (Rom. 14:2-6). If, after becoming a believer, a Jewish father wished to have his sons circumcised in accordance with ancestral custom, Paul had no objection (Bruce). Paul had his spiritual son Timothy circumcised (16:3). To the Jew, he became as a Jew (1 Cor. 9:20). “There is no evidence that he actively persuaded Jewish Christians to forego circumcising their children or giving up Jewish customs” (Marshall).

“What then? The assembly must certainly meet, for they will hear that you have come” (21:22). In light of these rumors, the elders ask what should be done (Alexander). They remind Paul that the church will know he is in town and want to hear from him.

The trouble Paul encountered in his “Trouble Town” was a rumor. This passage illustrates that we should not judge inappropriately. These believers judged Paul without getting the facts first. First Corinthians 4:5 teaches that we should not judge because we are the wrong judge at the wrong time, using the wrong standard. This passage also illustrates that we should not spread gossip. A rumor is an unconfirmed report. If someone speaks to you about someone else, tell them to go see that person. As someone has said, “Wise men talk about ideas. Ordinary men talk about things and fools talk about each other.”

The Recommendation

Their Proposal “Therefore do what we tell you: We have four men who have taken a vow” (21:23). The elders conclude (“therefore”) that because there are so many zealous Jewish believers, who will unquestionably be present when the church gathers, they have a plan he should follow. They gave Paul some wise advice. It involves four men who have taken a vow. The vow was, no doubt, the Nazirite vow recorded in Numbers. 6:1-21 (21:24; Alexander).

“Take them and be purified with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave *their* heads, and that all may know that those things of which they were informed concerning you are nothing, but *that* you yourself also walk orderly and keep the law” (21:24). The proposed plan of the elders consisted of several parts. In the first place, Paul himself should “be purified.” Some say this is a reference to the Nazirite vow (Rackham), but the Nazirite vow does not fit the details described below (Alexander; Bruce; Marshall). The other possibility is that purification is the rite that preceded every ceremonial act as required by the Law (Ex. 19:10, 14; Alexander; Bruce). This would enable Paul to take part in the conclusion of the Nazirite vow of the four men when they cut their hair (Num. 6:5; Alexander).

The second part of the plan is for Paul to pay the expenses of the four men who had taken a vow. Barclay explains the Nazarite vow. "This was a vow taken in gratitude for some special blessing from the hand of God. It involved abstention from meat and wine for thirty days, during which the hair had to be allowed to grow. It seems that sometimes, at least, the last seven days had to be spent entirely in the Temple courts. At the end, certain offerings had to be brought—a year-old lamb for a sin offering, a ram for a peace offering, a basket of unleavened bread, cakes of fine flour mingled with oil, a meat offering, and a drink offering. Finally, the hair had to be shorn and burned on the altar with the sacrifice. It is obvious that this was a costly business. Work had to be given up and all the elements of the sacrifice had to be bought. It was quite beyond the resources of many who would have wished to undertake it. So it was considered an act of piety for some wealthier person to defray the expenses of someone taking the vow."

Rackham discusses Paul's pocketbook, pointing out, "At Ephesus and elsewhere he had labored with his hands to support himself; now, however, the narrative gives the impression of his being a man of means. The Christians ask him to pay the expenses of the Nazirites; towards the Jewish aristocracy S. Paul acts as an equal; the Romans treat him with a courtesy not usually meted out to poor and insignificant prisoners. Felix expected a bribe from him. The appeal to Caesar must have been a very expensive affair; no more than now could a poor man carry his case from court to court. The expense of the voyage and imprisonment was increased by the presence of Luke and Aristarchus. At Rome, Paul lived for two years in a dwelling for which he had to pay rent. No doubt the Christians would gladly have contributed; but refusing as S. Paul did to make his gospel a burden to any church, it is most unlikely that he would have put them to the expense of an appeal in a case where his personal liberty rather than a principle of the gospel was at stake. The Philippians indeed sent a contribution to Rome, but S. Paul's letter of acknowledgment seems to imply that he had sufficient. Prof. Ramsay has called attention to these points and suggests that as Paul came of a wealthy family, either they may have been reconciled to him by this time (and the action of his nephew at Jerusalem points to friendly relations) or S. Paul may have inherited property through the death of some relative. On the other hand, it is precisely in the above-mentioned Epistle to the Philippians, written subsequently to this time, that S. Paul declares he had 'suffered the loss of all things.' But there is a way out of the difficulty. We may imagine that S. Luke was fairly well off; and having set before us in the Acts the community of goods as the ideal of church life, he would have been only too ready to place his purse, as well as his person, at the service of the apostle. Such a service of private affection S. Paul would have accepted."

As a result of Paul's participation in this portion of the Mosaic Law, it is the opinion of the elders that the rumors would be proven false and it would be shown that Paul does indeed keep the Mosaic Law. The Greek word translated "walk orderly" means "to walk in line," especially of marching in file to battle. Alexander says it means "to keep the ranks."

Rackham says, "Acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah, as long as it caused no radical interference with the Judaic customs of life, was merely regarded as a foolish eccentricity." He also says, "It was only a few months, or rather weeks since he had published his Epistle to the Romans, and a copy of it had probably reached the mother church. In any case, S. Paul's doctrine of justification by faith had become notorious; it was a doctrine very easy to be misunderstood, and—as the Epistle itself shows (iii 8)—it had already been misinterpreted. In some circles, S. Paul was painted as a preacher of apostasy, not merely from the Law of Moses, but from the moral law itself."

Their Perspective “But concerning the Gentiles who believe, we have written *and* decided that they should observe no such thing, except that they should keep themselves from *things* offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality” (21:25). The elders go on to explain that as they had decided at the Jerusalem Council, Gentile believers should observe only keeping themselves from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality (15:29).

The Purification “Then Paul took the men, and the next day, having been purified with them, entered the temple to announce the expiration of the days of purification, at which time an offering should be made for each one of them” (21:26). As planned, the next day, Paul went through the purification ceremony and he entered the Temple to announce the expiration date for the four who had taken the Nazirite vow. This announcement was so the priests could make arrangements for the sacrifices when the time for the offerings came (Alexander). The elders were wise in the recommendation they gave to Paul. When we encounter situations not covered by the commands of Scripture, we should act lovingly and wisely. Acting lovingly, as in this case, may be costly.

Paul submitted to the elders. “I used to think that God’s gifts were on shelves—one above another, and the taller we grow, the easier we can reach them. Now I find that God’s gifts are on shelves—one beneath another, and the lower we stoop, the more we get!” (F. B. Meyer).

The Result

The Protest “Now when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him,” (21:27). The expiration of the Nazirite vow was seven days from the time Paul made the announcement (21:26). Those seven days were almost up when Jews from Asia saw Paul in the Temple. The Jews from Asia were the Jews from Ephesus (21:29; Alexander). These Jews stirred up the crowd and arrested Paul.

“crying out, ‘Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches all *men* everywhere against the people, the law, and this place; and furthermore he also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place’” (21:28). The cry of the Jews from Asia was for help. Their claim was that Paul taught everyone everywhere against the Jewish people, the Jewish Law and the Jewish city, Jerusalem (6:11, 13). The “all men everywhere” is an obvious exaggeration. Alexander calls it “a double hyperbole.” Furthermore, he brought Gentiles into the Temple, defiling the holy site. According to Josephus, Titus allowed the Jews to kill a Roman who was guilty of such a violation (Alexander). It was a capital offense (Bruce).

“(For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.)” (21:29). Luke explains (“for”) that these Jews from Asia had seen Trophimus the Ephesian with Paul in the cry of Jerusalem and had assumed that Paul had brought him into the Temple.

The Temple was divided into several concentric rectangular courts. The Gentiles were allowed in the outer court called “the Court of the Gentiles,” but they were not permitted to enter the “Court of the women” and the “Court of Israel” (Marshall). Between the Court of the Gentiles and the Court of the women was a barrier. In that barrier, there were inset tablets with this inscription—“No man of an alien race is to enter within the balustrade and fence that goes around the Temple, and if anyone is taken in the act, let him know that he has himself to blame for the penalty of death that follows” (Barclay). Marshall says the inscription read, “No foreign

may enter within the territory which surrounds the temple and enclosure. Anyone who was caught doing so will have himself to blame for his ensuing death.”

Psychologists say that rumormongering is an attempt to deal with anxieties and uncertainties by generating and passing stories and suppositions that can explain things, address anxieties, and provide a rationale for behavior.

The Arrest “And all the city was disturbed; and the people ran together, seized Paul, and dragged him out of the temple; and immediately the doors were shut” (21:30). Such an accusation was so serious it would not be too much to say that it had disturbed all the Jews in Jerusalem. Rumors spread quickly. Repetition fosters credibility and belief. Furthermore, rumors aren’t merely repeated, they’re refined according to the teller’s beliefs to enhance credibility. “Though a rumor does not have a leg to stand on, it travels mighty fast!” (proverb, cited by Wiersbe).

A crowd gathered, seized Paul, dragged him out of the Temple, and shut the doors. They shut the door between the court of Israel and the court of the Gentiles (Alexander) to prevent further trouble (Marshall). Bruce says that this may have been the moment for Luke when the Jerusalem Temple ceased to fulfill its role. The exclusion of God’s message and messenger sealed its bloom; it was now ripe for the destruction that Jesus had predicted many years before (Lk. 21:6).

The Rescue “Now as they were seeking to kill him, news came to the commander of the garrison that all Jerusalem was in an uproar” (21:31). At this time, the Romans ruled over Jerusalem. To watch over the Jews assembled at the Temple, the Romans had built a fortress at the northwest corner of the Temple. A Roman garrison constantly occupied the Antonia Fortress to watch the Jews in the Temple, especially during the festivals (Alexander). As the Jews were attempting to kill Paul, news of uproar in Jerusalem reached the commander in the Fortress.

“He immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down to them. And when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul” (21:32). The fortress was connected to the outer court of the Temple of two flights and stairs so that, in case of a riot, the Roman garrison might intervene as quickly as possible (Bruce). Taking soldiers and centurions with him, the commander ran down the steps from the Fortress to the place in the Temple, where they were beating Paul. The fact that the commander took more than one centurion implies he was followed by at least 200 men (Alexander). As the Romans approached, the Jews ceased beating Paul.

The Investigation “Then the commander came near and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains; and he asked who he was and what he had done” (21:33). Arriving on the scene, the Roman commander took charge of Paul, had him put in chains (21:11) and asked who he was and what he had done. The questions were not directed to Paul himself but to the people around him (Alexander).

The Reaction “And some among the multitude cried one thing and some another. So, when he could not ascertain the truth because of the tumult, he commanded him to be taken into the barracks” (21:34). The crowd was confused! Some cited one charge and others cried something else. The Greek word translated “tumult” means “noise, uproar, tumult,” as an excited mob. When the commander could not determine what was going on because of the noisy uproar, he commanded that Paul be taken to the barracks inside the Antonio Fortress.

“When he reached the stairs, he had to be carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob” (21:35). When Paul reached the stairs of Antonio Fortress, the situation became such that he had to be carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob. Alexander comments that Luke included this bit of information because he “well remembered seeing his beloved teacher, as the soldiers led him up the stairs, completely lifted from his feet by the resistless

pressure of the crowd, so that without intending it, the soldiers carried him instead of leading him.”

“For the multitude of the people followed after, crying out, ‘Away with him!’” (21:36). As Luke explains (“for”), the crowd followed, crying, “Away with him” (Lk. 23:18; Jn. 19:15).

In an eastern land, a woman repeated a bit of gossip about a neighbor, and within a short time, the whole town knew the story. The slandered person was deeply hurt and most unhappy. But then the lady responsible for spreading the rumor learned that it was completely untrue, so she went to a wise old sage to find out what she could do to repair the damage. After listening to her problem, he said, “Go to the marketplace, purchase a fowl, and have it killed. Then, on your way home, pluck its feathers one by one and drop them along the path!” Though surprised by this unusual advice, the woman did as she was told. The next day, she informed the man that she had done as instructed. “Now go and collect all those feathers and bring them back to me,” the sage said. The lady followed the same path, but to her dismay, the wind had blown all the feathers away. After searching all day long, she returned with only two or three in hand. “You see,” said the wise old man, “it is easy to drop them but impossible to bring them all back. Likewise, it does not take much to spread a false rumor, but you can never completely undo the wrong.”

Summary: When you encounter a problem that even wise counsel cannot solve, you do what is wise and trust the Lord to use you.

Rackham suggests that Luke composes the passage to correspond to the conclusion of his Gospel, “Where the passion of the Lord is narrated at equal length and with equal richness of detail. Nor indeed must we forget the parallel with the first part of the Acts. Paul is now filling at Jerusalem the part once played by S. Peter: like S. Peter, he also addresses the Jews at a Pentecost, stands before the Sanhedrin, utters a sentence of judgment on all Ananias and a hypocrite, and like S. Peter’s his career is arrested by bondage at Jerusalem. But this parallel is absorbed in the imitation of a greater than either. The history of the Lord’s passion seems to be repeating itself. Like the Lord Jesus, Paul is carried before the Sanhedrin and smitten on the mouth; the multitude of the people cry out *Away with him*; his fellow-countrymen deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles; he is accused before the Roman governor and stands before a Herod; his accusers are the same, the Sadducean high-priesthood, as also the counts of the indictment which culminate in charge of treason against Caesar; three times he is pronounced to have done nothing worthy of death, yet he narrowly escapes a scourging, and the governor leaves him bound in order to please the Jews: incidentally the trial of Jesus resulted in the renewal of friendly relations between Pilate and Herod Antipas, so likewise Paul’s case enables Festus to pay a compliment to Herod Agrippa II. Finally, the close of the book leaves the apostle in a state of comparative freedom and activity: like S. Peter in ch. xii, he has experienced a deliverance—almost, we might say, a resurrection from the dead. This resemblance is not due to arbitrary invention. It is the natural working out of a law which had been enunciated, by the Lord himself: ‘as the master, so shall the servant be.’”

Seek wise counsel. Being submissive is wise. Wise counsel may not solve the problem. If wisdom does not work, trust the Lord to use the situation. Charles Jones told a group that had come to hear him speak, “Nothing works. You would not be here if you had found something that worked.” That is a bit strong, but there is some truth to it.

God used Paul's imprisonment to spread the gospel to many Roman soldiers and governmental officials. The Lord knew how to best expand the gospel where it otherwise would not have been heard. His ways are perfect and all of His ways are blessed.

In his devotional classic *My Utmost for His Highest*, Oswald Chambers says, "God plants his saints in the mostly useless places. We say, 'I should be here because I'm so useful.' Jesus never estimated His life by the standard of greatest use. God puts people His people where they will glorify Him, and they are not capable of judging where that is" (Oswald Chambers, cited by Hughes).

HOW TO GIVE A TESTIMONY

One way to tell people about the Lord is to share what happened to you. Many believers give their “testimony,” but have never been told how to do it. Consequently, it is not as effective as it could be. The formula is simple. This is illustrated by the way Paul used his testimony. What is the most effective way to give your testimony of conversion to Christ?

The Request

The Request “Then as Paul was about to be led into the barracks, he said to the commander, “May I speak to you?” He replied, “Can you speak Greek?” (21:37). Because of false accusations and a riot, Paul had been arrested by the Romans (21:27-33). As he was being led into the Antonia Fortress, Paul asked the commander if he could have a word with him. The commander was surprised that Paul could speak “educated” Greek (Bruce).

The Mistake “Are you not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a rebellion and led the four thousand assassins out into the wilderness?” (21:38). The commander thought that Paul was a famous revolutionary. Barclay explains, “The captain was amazed to hear the accents of cultured Greek coming from this man whom the crowd was out to lynch. Somewhere about A.D. 54, an Egyptian had led a band of desperate men out to the Mount of Olives with a promise that he could make the walls of the city fall down before him. The Romans had dealt swiftly and efficiently with his followers, but he himself had escaped and the captain had thought that Paul was this revolutionary Egyptian comeback.... But when Paul started his credentials, the captain knew that, whatever else he was, he was no revolutionary thug.” Josephus mentions the Egyptian (Bruce and Marshall for more details).

The Correction “But Paul said, ‘I am a Jew from Tarsus, in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city; and I implore you, permit me to speak to the people’” (21:39). Paul explained he was a citizen of Tarsus, which is no “mean” city. The Greek word translated “mean” means “unknown, obscure.” This is an understatement (a litotes, A-S). It was famous as a city of culture, education, and commerce (MacDonald). Paul requested permission to speak to the crowd.

The Permission “So when he had given him permission, Paul stood on the stairs and motioned with his hand to the people. And when there was a great silence, he spoke to *them* in the Hebrew language, saying,” (21:40). Having been permitted to speak, Paul motioned for silence and began to speak. Paul spoke in Hebrew to arouse better feelings and prove he was indeed an Israelite (Alexander). He probably spoke in their Aramaic vernacular, which, according to Bruce, is the meaning of the word “Hebrew” in the New Testament, except in Revelation 9:11 and Revelation 16:16 (so also Marshall; Wiersbe). Marshall says the greatest Jewish scholar of the first century, Philo of Alexandria, wrote extensive commentaries on the book of Moses, but he could not read them in Hebrew.

The Speech

“Brethren and fathers, hear my defense before you now” (22:1). The *Textus Receptus*, the *Majority Text*, the *Critical Text* and the KJV all read “Men, brethren, and Father, yet the NKJV, NASB, and the NIV omit “men.” Alexander says that “men and brethren” was the customary address, but, like Stephen, Paul adds “Fathers” (7:2), either as a general expression of respect or, as most interpreters suppose, with reference the priest and elders who were present. Paul invites them to hear his defense. The Greek word translated “defense” means “a speech in defense.” It is the Greek word from which we get the English word “apologetics.”

“And when they heard that he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, they kept all the more silent. Then he said” (22:2). When they heard him speak in Hebrew, they kept quiet to listen. He spoke either in ancient Hebrew or an Aramaic modification, probably the latter (Alexander). Alexander describes the scene, “This breathless stillness of the multitude so lately raging adds to the sublimity of Paul’s position, standing between the Jewish temple on the Roman Fortress, and about to dress, for the first and last time, his assembled brethren.”

Prior to His Conversion “I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers’ law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today” (22:3). Rackham says Paul’s speech is marked by an emphatic “I” at the beginning of each division (22:3; 22:6; 22:17). The speech can also be divided into before, during, and after his conversion.

Paul begins by describing what he was like before his conversion. His Jewish credentials are impressive. He affirms that it was a loyal Jew (Marshall). He was, of course, born a Jew in Tarsus of Cilicia, but he was brought up in Jerusalem, “exposed only to Jewish influence” (Bruce).

Paul learned from the great Gamaliel, a leader of the Pharisees from the tradition of Hillel (Marshall) and a respected teacher of the Law in Jerusalem (5:34). When the time came for his higher education, he was sent to any of the academies of Tarsus; he attended the school of Gamaliel (Bruce). Paul literally sat at the feet of Gamaliel. Teachers sat on an elevated seat and the students sat on the ground at their feet (Rackham).

According to Pharisaic tradition, Paul was trained in the strict interpretation of the Mosaic Law (Bruce). The Greek word translated “taught” means “to train children,” hence, generally, “to teach, instruct, chasten, correct.” Alexander says it implies systematic disciple, but in the New Testament, it is most frequently used in the secondary sense of correcting, chastening, as a necessary part of discipline. Paul is proving that it was a “true” Jew; he is identifying himself with his hearers (Rackham).

Paul remains zealous toward God, as they are to this very day. Paul once said of himself, “I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers” (Gal. 1:14). What he has said has placed him with them as a zealous defender of the Law (Marshall).

“I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women” (22:4). Paul continues by claiming he is not only a zealous Jew, but he was a persecutor of those who followed the Way. For the expression “the Way,” see comments on Acts 9:2. He was arrested, imprisoned, and had put to death, both men and women (6:1; 22:20; 22:26; 26:10). “He proved the sincerity of his conviction by persecuting all that contradicted them” (Alexander). He went further than his audience in zeal (Marshall). He avoided irritating them by using a “party” name (Rackham).

“as also the high priest bears me witness, and all the council of the elders, from whom I also received letters to the brethren, and went to Damascus to bring in chains even those who were there to Jerusalem to be punished” (22:5). Paul contends that the Sanhedrim could witness to fact they gave him letters to the Jewish brethren in Damascus to arrest and punish believers of the Way. It was a matter of record or recollection (Alexander). The sincerity of his persecuting zeal is demonstrated by his pursuit of believers outside of the Holy Land (Rackham).

The way to give your testimony is to begin by telling what you were like before your conversion. When we think of someone giving their testimony, we think of someone who had an exceedingly sinful past, such as a gang member, a drug addict, or a criminal. Notice that Paul is talking about how religious he was. When you give your testimony, tell your story, whether it is exceedingly sinful or religious. You may have grown up in a Christian home, attending church all your life. Or you may have grown up in a Christian home and rebelled against it. Or you may not have grown up in a Christian home and lived a moral life. Or you may not have grown up in a Christian home and lived an immoral life. Do not feel that you must have lived a really wicked life to give your testimony. Your testimony is your story. What were you like before you came to Christ? Some people will identify with your story. Others will find it interesting because everyone likes a story.

His Conversion “Now it happened, as I journeyed and came near Damascus at about noon, suddenly a great light from heaven shone around me” (22:6). Paul explains that it was as he was traveling to Damascus about noon that he saw a light shine from heaven. As compared to the account of his conversion in Acts 9, this statement adds that it was about noon and the light was great (9:3). The light from heaven outshined the noonday sun, indicating it was supernatural; it was the light of the divine glory (Rackham).

“And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’” (22:7). As a result of the vision, Paul fell to the ground and he heard a voice asking why he was persecuting Him (9:4).

“So, I answered, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And He said to me, ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.’” (22:8). When Paul asked who was speaking, he was told it was Jesus of Nazareth, the One he was persecuting. Paul adds “of Nazareth” to Luke’s account (9:5). For Jesus to be speaking to Paul means that He was raised from the dead.

“And those who were with me indeed saw the light and were afraid, but they did not hear the voice of Him who spoke to me” (22:9). Paul says those who were with him saw the light but did not hear the voice. Earlier, Luke related, “The men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one” (9:7). Do the two accounts contradict each other? Acts 9:7 says they were speechless. Acts 22:9 says they were afraid. This is not a contradiction. The two statements are complimentary. Fear is the cause; speech is the effect; one is inward, and the other is the outward indication (Alexander). Acts 9:7 says they heard a voice but saw no one. Acts 22:9 says they did not hear a voice. This “seeming inconsistency” has several possible explanations (see Alexander). Many say the solution is that Paul’s companions heard a voice but did not understand what was being said (Alexander; Bruce; Marshall; Wiersbe).

“So, I said, ‘What shall I do, Lord?’ And the Lord said to me, ‘Arise and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all things which are appointed for you to do’” (22:10). When Paul asked the Lord what he should do, he was told to continue the trip into Damascus where he would be told (9:6). Paul wrote, “But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which I preached is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught *it*, but *it*

came through the revelation of Jesus Christ” (Gal. 1:11-12). When you give your testimony, tell people the circumstances of how you heard the gospel.

After His Conversion “And since I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of those who were with me, I came into Damascus” (22:11). Having been blinded by the light (21:6), Paul had to be led by the hand into Damascus (9:8).

“Then a certain Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good testimony with all the Jews who dwelt *there*, (22:12) came to me; and he stood and said to me, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight.’ And at that same hour I looked up at him” (22:13). In Damascus, Ananias was instrumental in Paul receiving his sight (9:17). Paul omits the conversation between the Lord and Ananias (9:10-16). Unlike what is recorded in Acts 9, Paul mentions that Ananias was a law-abiding Jew, who had a good testimony among the Jews in Damascus. The fact that Ananias was a believer (9:10) is “quietly omitted” (Marshall).

“Then he said, ‘The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth’” (22:14). Ananias informed Paul that God had chosen him to know His will as well as see and hear Jesus. Diplomatically, Paul refers to God as “the God of *our* fathers” and he speaks of Jesus as “the Just One,” which is probably a Messianic term (3:14; 7:52; Marshall; Wiersbe).

“For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard” (22:15). The will of God for Paul was he was to witness to *all* men (9:15). Having seen and heard the Lord (22:14), Paul could bear witness of what he had seen and heard (22:15).

“And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (22:16). In the meantime, Paul was to be baptized (9:18). The way this verse is translated it sounds as if Paul had to be baptized to have his sins washed away. The word “and” between “arise” and “be baptized” is not in the Greek text. In the Greek text, this sentence consists of two clauses: a command and a participle: 1) arising, be baptized, and 2) be washed, having called. The two participles (“arising” and “having called”) are aorist, meaning that the action of the participle comes before the action of the command. In other words, “arising” comes before baptism and “calling” comes before washing. A proper translation would be, “Now that you have called on the Lord and had your sins washed away, arise and be baptized.” The chronological order of the various elements is as follows: calling, washing, arising, and baptizing. This verse does not teach that baptism is necessary for the forgiveness of sins. Salvation is by calling on the Lord (2:21; Jn. 4:10), not by being baptism. Wiersbe points out, “Paul was filled with the Spirit before he was baptized, and this would indicate that he was already born again.” Baptism is an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual cleansing from sin (Bruce).

“Now it happened, when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I was in a trance” (22:17). “Now it happened” indicates a transition or introduction to another topic (Alexander). Paul relates the time when he was in the Temple in Jerusalem, not just in the Holy Land, but in the Holy City and the Holy House (Alexander). This was probably Paul’s visit to Jerusalem recorded in Acts 9:26-30 (Bruce; Marshall). It is as if he said, “You seem to think that after I became a Christian, I forsook the Temple and the Holy City and my old associations as the Jew, but you are very much mistaken” (Alexander). At any rate, Paul was in a trance in the Temple.

“and saw Him saying to me, ‘Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, for they will not receive your testimony concerning Me’” (22:18). The Lord told Paul to get out of Jerusalem quickly because they would not receive his testimony.

“So, I said, ‘Lord, they know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believe on You’” (22:19). Paul told the Lord that the Jews were aware that he had imprisoned and beat those who believed in Him. Again, Paul tactfully avoids the name of Jesus, referring to Him as the “Lord.”

“And when the blood of Your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by consenting to his death, and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him” (22:20). Paul adds that when Stephen was being martyred, he not only consented to his death, he was guarding his clothes.

“Then He said to me, ‘Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles’” (22:21). At this point, the Lord tells Paul to leave Jerusalem, where they looked on him as a traitor and turncoat (Bruce). The Lord will send Paul to the Gentiles.

When you give your testimony, tell what happened to you after you trusted Christ, especially now that you know for sure that you are going to heaven.

The Response

The Jewish Reaction “And they listened to him until this word, and then they raised their voices and said, ‘Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he is not fit to live!’” (22:22). The crowd was attentive to Paul, until he mentioned the word “Gentile.” when they heard that, they spontaneously erupted, screaming that Paul was not even fit to live. Alexander is of the opinion that it was not simply the mention of the word “Gentile” that provoked them. He maintains that it was Paul’s claim of a divine commission to preach to the Gentiles, which was connected to the charge against him of apostasy and blasphemy (21:28). Barclay says, “It was the mention of Gentiles which set the mob ablaze again. It was not that the Jews objected to the preaching to the Gentiles; what they objected to was that the Gentiles were being offered privileges before they first accepted circumcision and the Law. If Paul had preached the yoke of Judaism to the Gentiles all would have been well; it was because he preached the grace of Christianity to them that the Jews were enraged.”

“Then, as they cried out and tore off their clothes and threw dust into the air” (22:23). They were not only screaming, they “tore” their clothes and tossed dust into the air. The Greek word translated “tore” means to “throw, cast, hurl, shake. They were shaking their garments, not throwing them off (Rackham). They were waving their clothes in the air (Bruce). Rackham says that throwing dust on their heads was a symbol of expressing abhorrence (2 Sam. 16:13) or grief (Job 2:12; Rev. 18:19).

The Roman Response “The commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, and said that he should be examined under scourging, so that he might know why they shouted so against him” (22:24). Since Paul spoke in Aramaic, the commander did not know what Paul had said to the crowd (Bruce). He decided to interrogate Paul under torture. The instrument of torture was a leather thong, weighted with rough pieces of metal or bone and attached to a stout wooden handle. If a man did not die under the scourge, he might be crippled for life (Bruce). Rackham remarks that cruel methods of extracting the truth by torture universally prevailed to modern times.

The Revelation “And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who stood by, ‘Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman, and uncondemned?’” (22:25). As they were binding Paul with thongs in preparation for the scourging, He asked if it was lawful to scourge an unconvicted Roman citizen. Cicero said, “It is a misdeed for a Roman citizen to be bound; it is a crime for him to be beaten; it is almost as bad as to murder a father to kill him”

(Cicero, cited by Barclay). Paul played his trump card (Marshall). Needless suffering is not a Christian principle (Rackham).

The Rescue “When the centurion heard *that*, he went and told the commander, saying, ‘Take care what you do, for this man is a Roman’” (22:26). The moment the centurion heard that Paul might be a Roman citizen, he immediately went to the commander (22:24) to inform him of Paul’s Roman citizenship.

“Then the commander came and said to him, ‘Tell me, are you a Roman?’ He said, ‘Yes’” (22:27). Upon hearing of the possibility that the prisoner might be a Roman citizen, the commander decided to investigate personally. When he asked Paul if he were a Roman, Paul answered in the affirmative.

“The commander answered, ‘With a large sum I obtained this citizenship’ and Paul said, ‘But I was born *a citizen*’” (22:28). Probably surprised at Paul’s answer, the commander tells Paul that he obtained his Roman citizenship with a large sum of money, which was probably a bribe (Bruce). Paul responds that he did not purchase his Roman citizenship; he was born a citizen. That means that his father was a Roman citizen, which either he or an ancestor had received for rendering some services to the state.

“Then immediately those who were about to examine him withdrew from him; and the commander was also afraid after he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him” (22:29). In the Greek text, the word “then” is actually the word “therefore.” It does not mark a time sequence but is a logical connection to what has been said (Alexander). Because it was determined that Paul was a Roman citizen, the soldiers who were about to scourge him withdrew from him and the commander was afraid because he had bound a Roman citizen and was about to beat him. He shuddered as he realized how closely he had come to seriously breaking Roman law (Bruce).

The Result “The next day, because he wanted to know for certain why the Jews accused him, he released him from *his* bonds, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down and set him before them” (22:30). Now the commander still needed to know what Paul has been accused of by the Jews. So the next day, he summoned the Sanhedrin to appear before him (Marshall). Being the chief representative of the Roman authority in Jerusalem, if he ordered the Sanhedrin to meet, and they met (Bruce). Paul was also brought to the meeting.

Summary: When Paul was in a crisis, he used it as an opportunity to give his testimony, which caused a reaction and resulted in another opportunity.

Paul was beaten. Ernst Haenchen, a liberal German theologian, believes the story is a fabrication because, he says, “A man who has only just been beaten up by a fanatical mob is physically no longer capable of making such a speech. This reason proves that the speech and the dialogue preparing for it are unhistorical” (Haenchen, cited by Hughes). Paul was beaten, but he did not let his physical beating prevent him from grabbing this opportunity.

Paul did not give a point-by-point reply to the charges against him (Marshall). Rather he used the opportunity to testify. Thus, his speech becomes the means of preaching the gospel. Paul used a personal crisis to give his testimony.

Paul used wisdom. He identified with his audience. He spoke to them in their language (22:2). The city he was brought up in was “this city” (22:3). He did not say “your” fathers. Rather he said “our” fathers (22:3). Instead of using the name of Jesus, he spoke of the “Just One” (22:15).

Paul's testimony did not win the audience, but he did his job of communicating about the Lord. They did not accept what he had to say, but neither could they answer him. T. H. Huxley, a well-known agnostic, was with a group of men at a weekend house party. On Sunday morning, while most of them were preparing to go to church, he approached a man known for his Christian character and said, "Suppose you stay at home and tell me why you are a Christian." The man, knowing he couldn't match wits with Huxley, hesitated. But the agnostic said gently, "I don't want to argue with you; I just want you to tell me simply what this Christ means to you." The man did, and when he finished, there were tears in Huxley's eyes as he said, "I would give my right hand if only I could believe that!" (*Our Daily Bread*, January 24, 1993).

Who knows what impact a testimony can have on some who hear it? Stephen's testimony had an impact on Paul (22:20). "A personal experience is the most unanswerable argument on earth" (Barclay). Paul's testimony resulted in other opportunities for witnessing. This incident led to speaking before the Sanhedrin. The rejection of Paul by the Jews led to an appeal to Rome (Rackham).

Do not underestimate the power of a testimony. Consider the testimonies recorded in John 1. John the apostle, who was probably one of the two disciples of John the Baptist who heard his testimony on this occasion, records the testimony of John the Baptist, "The next day John (the Baptist) saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!' This is He of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.' I did not know Him; but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore, I came baptizing with water.' And John bore witness, saying, 'I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit' 'I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God'" (Jn. 1:29-34). Notice the emphasis in the text on the *testimony* of John the Baptist (Jn. 1:32, 34).

The testimony of John the Baptist brought Andrew to Christ. "Again, the next day, John (the Baptist) stood with two of his disciples (Andrew and probably John, the author of the Gospel of John). And looking at Jesus as He walked, he (the Baptist) said, "Behold the Lamb of God!" The two disciples (Andrew and John) heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. Then, Jesus turned and, seeing them following, said to them, 'What do you seek?' They said to Him, 'Rabbi' (which is to say, when translated, Teacher), 'where are You staying?' He said to them, 'Come and see.' They came and saw where He was staying and remained with Him that day (now it was about the tenth hour). One of the two who heard John *speak*, and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother" (Jn. 1:35-40).

The testimony of Andrew brought Peter, his brother, to Christ! After Andrew spent the day with Jesus, "He first found his own brother Simon, and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah' (translated as Christ), and he brought him to Jesus. When Jesus looked at him, He said, 'You are Simon, the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas' (which is translated, A Stone)" (Jn. 1:41-42).

The testimony of Andrew and Peter helped bring Philip to Christ. The text says, "The following day Jesus wanted to go to Galilee, and He found Philip and said to him, 'Follow Me.' Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter" (Jn. 1:43-44). The author of the fourth Gospel says Philip was from the same city as Andrew and Peter, implying that Andrew and Peter had talked to Philip. That is confirmed by the fact that Philip told Nathanael, "We have

found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote; Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph” (Jn. 1:45). Notice Philip says, “We,” not “I.”

The testimony of Philip brought Nathanael to Christ. “Philip found Nathanael and said to him, ‘We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote; Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph’” (Jn. 1:45). As a result, Nathanael was converted (Jn. 1:49).

Only the Lord knows how many came to Christ because of the testimony of Andrew, Peter, Philip, and Nathanael. Why not start a chain reaction like that?

HOW BOLD SHOULD WE BE?

Most believers tend to be timid when it comes to telling others about the Lord. They are intimidated by others. It depends on the situation, but Paul illustrates just how bold we should be on occasion. In this case, Paul was bold concerning two issues.

In Pointing out Sin

Paul's Defense “Then Paul, looking earnestly at the council, said, ‘Men *and* brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day’” (23:1). The Greek word translated “looking earnestly” means “to look fixedly, gazed.” The council is the Sanhedrin (22:30), of which Paul had once been a member or, at least, a representative (Alexander). A group of 70 (or 71) led the Jewish teachers, with the high priest presiding (Wiersbe). The Greek word translated “live” means “to live as a citizen.” It is the Greek word from which comes the English “politics.”

Standing before the Sanhedrin, Paul looks at them intently, addresses them politely, and tells them boldly that he has lived before God in all good conscience until now. He proclaims his innocence (Rackham; cf. 1 Cor. 4:4) and calls his conscience an independent witness (Bruce). Marshall thinks Paul is concerned with the immediate past; he is rejecting the charges against him. Paul affirms that he is a loyal Jew who has lived as a good Jewish citizen (Wiersbe).

Paul speaks of having a good conscience. Should your conscience be your guide? Not necessarily. Conscience accuses or excuses (Rom. 2:15). It does not set the standard. It applies the standard you have accepted. A conscience can be a good conscience, or it can be defiled (1 Cor. 8:7) or even seared (1 Tim. 4:2). It is good when it relies on the truth in the Word of God. It is not accurate when it does not line up with the Word. The sun shining on a sundial gives an accurate reading, but a flashlight can make a sundial say anything you want.

Wiersbe says “conscience” means “to know with, to know together.” It is the inner “judge” or “witness” that approves when we do right and disapproves when we do wrong (Rom. 2:15). He goes on to say, “Conscience does not *set* the standard; it only *applies* it. The conscience of a thief would bother him if he told the truth about his fellow crooks just as much as a Christian’s conscience would convict him if he told a lie about his friends.” When believers repeatedly sin, they defile their conscience. They feel guilty at first, but the more they commit it, the less it bothers them. They can even get to the place where they justify what they do.

M. R. DeHaan says, “I was driving a new car and noticed in my rear-view mirror a policeman following me. I looked at my speedometer and it registered 25 miles. I kept it there for a half-mile, feeling perfectly secure and at ease, but the policeman followed me and finally beckoned me to the side of the road. ‘What’s your hurry?’ he asked, and I answered, ‘I’m not in a hurry.’ Quick came the reply, ‘Then why do you speed?’ He accused me of going 32 miles an hour. We argued for a few minutes, for I knew I had not exceeded 25 miles. Finally, I said, ‘Do I look like a fool? I saw you following me from Wealthy Street all the way to Hall. Can you imagine me deliberately speeding when I knew you were right behind?’ This made him think and he finally said, ‘This is a brand-new car; maybe your speedometer is at fault.’ Sure enough, we checked it and found my speedometer in which I had securely trusted, was ‘off.’ I was let ‘off’ too with the warning, ‘Check your speedometer.’ Conscience is your speedometer, but it will get

you in trouble unless checked with the official standard the Word of God” (*Our Daily Bread*, 11/11/09).

The Reaction “And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth” (23:2). The high priest at the time was a man named Ananias. Josephus describes him as an avaricious, overbearing man (Alexander), an insolent, quick-temper character (Josephus, *Antiquities*, 20: 199). Rackham says he had acquired enormous wealth by violence (see Bruce for details). Wiersbe calls him one of the most corrupt men to be named High Priest. Ananias commanded those standing by Paul to strike him on the mouth, implying a previously unlawful use of it as well as an injunction to cease speaking (Alexander). This was illegal; Jewish law said, “He who strikes the cheek of one Israelite, strikes as it were the glory of God,” and “He that strikes a man strikes the Holy One” (Hughes). Marshall remarks that such things can happen in heated debates, even in modern legislative assemblies.

Paul’s Boldness “Then Paul said to him, ‘God will strike you, *you* whitewashed wall! For you sit to judge me according to the law, and do you command me to be struck contrary to the law?’” (23:3). Calling him a “whitewashed wall,” Paul predicted that God would strike Ananias because he broke the Law (Mt. 23:27). The Jewish painted their tombs white to warn people that it was a tomb because touching a tomb resulted in defilement (Hughes). The metaphor “whitewashed wall” is a reference to hypocrisy. Alexander says Ananias would be judged for his unjust treatment of Paul and arbitrarily condemning Paul before he heard him. Bruce explains, “The rights of defendants were carefully safeguarded by Jewish law, and they were presumed innocent until proven guilty. Paul had not been properly charged, let alone tried and convicted. The high priest, who was there to administer the law, had broken the law by ordering Paul to be struck.” When Jesus was struck during His interrogation, He also protested the action’s illegality (Jn. 18:21-23).

By the way, Paul’s prediction came true. Years later, Ananias was assassinated as a pro-Roman by Jewish guerrillas, who found him hiding in an aqueduct at Herod’s palace (Wiersbe; Bruce; Marshall).

The Response “And those who stood by said, ‘Do you revile God’s high priest?’” (23:4). Those who heard what Paul said told Paul he was reviling a High Priest.

Paul’s Confession “Then Paul said, ‘I did not know, brethren, that he was the high priest; for it is written, ‘You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people’” (23:5). Paul’s response to the accusation that he reviled the High Priest was that he did not know Ananias was the High Priest and quotes Exodus 22:28.

How could Paul not know which man in the Sanhedrin was the High Priest? Various explanations have been given. Paul knew Ananias was the high priest, but he confesses his fault of forgetting for the moment his office and the reverence for it the Scripture commends (Rackham). Another explanation is Paul was denying that Ananias was the kind of High Priest that would make him violate the Law in Exodus (Alexander; Marshall). Barclay says Ananias was notorious as a glutton, a thief, and a rapacious robber. Hence, Paul’s answer really means, “This man sitting there—I never knew a man like that could be high priest of Israel.” Other suggestions include Ananias not wearing his roles (Edersheim) and Paul having poor vision (Hughes).

Paul did not seem to think he had done anything wrong here; when he was before Felix, he said, “Or else let those who are *here* themselves say if they found any wrongdoing in me while I stood before the council unless *it is* for this one statement which I cried out, standing among them, ‘Concerning the resurrection of the dead I am being judged by you this day’” (24:20-21).

Besides, Paul explains what he meant (“for”). He says “*for* it is written, ‘You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.’” In other words, Paul was being sarcastic. He was saying, you shall not speak evil of a ruler, but I did not know he was a ruler because of his evil (see Barclay).

Paul confronted these religious leaders with their hypocrisy. He had a good conscience. He had proof of their hypocrisy. He did not seek them out to confront them, but he did when the opportunity presented itself. Jesus said, “As the Father has sent Me, I also send you” (Jn. 20:21) and “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the *sins* of any, they are retained” (Jn. 20:23). He also said, “You will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am *He*, you will die in your sins” (Jn. 8:24). When given an opportunity, believers should confront hypocritical religious leaders.

In Pointing out Error

The Exclamation “But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, ‘Men *and* brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!’” (23:6). At this point, Paul changes his strategy. The English translation implies that at this point, Paul perceived, for the first time, that both Sadducees and Pharisees were present. A better translation would be “knowing that” (NIV; Alexander). There were major differences between the Sadducees and Pharisees. Barclay explains, “The Pharisees believed in the minutiae of the oral Law; the Sadducees accepted only the written Law. The Pharisees believed in predestination; the Sadducees believed in free-will. The Pharisees believed in angels and spirits; the Sadducees did not. Above all, the Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the dead; the Sadducees did not.”

Rackham says the Pharisees enjoyed the support of the people. The Sadducees were the aristocracy. Since they were interested in preserving their position, they were “extremely jealous of any disturbance which might cause the intervention of the Romans.” He also states that according to Josephus, the predominant characteristics of the Sadducees “at this time were cruelty and avarice. ‘They were cruel above all the Jews in their judgments.’ The high-priests surrounded themselves with armed retainers and acted like lawless tyrants. They robbed the inferior priests of their share of the tithes to enrich themselves, even sending their servants to take the grain from the threshing floors by force.” The Sadducees were Roman sympathizers who wanted to maintain the status quo, which was to their advantage, while the Pharisees were silent protesters against Rome (Marshall).

Paul addresses the Sanhedrin with the phrase “Men and brethren.” Barclay points out, “To say *Brethren* was to put himself on an equal footing with the court; for the normal beginning when addressing the Sanhedrin was, “Rulers of the people and elders of Israel.” Paul declared himself to be a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee and that he was being judged because of his belief in hope and in the resurrection of the dead. By “hope,” Paul means the hope of Israel, the promise of a coming Messiah (Alexander; Rackham). Although the resurrection is introduced in general terms, the real point is the possibility of the resurrection of Jesus (Marshall; see also Wiersbe). Marshall remarks, “Paul, even as a Christian, was still in many respects a Pharisee, and was capable of using an opportunist argument.”

“And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly was divided” (23:7). The Greek word translated “dissension” means “strife, insurrection.” The result of Paul’s remark was not just a discussion but a dispute, a “violent commotion” (Alexander). The result of the disruption was division. The Greek word translated

“divided” means “to be divided into factions.” It is the Greek word from which comes the English word “schism.”

The Explanation “For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection; and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both” (23:8). Luke explains (“for”) that the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection, angels, or spirits, while the Pharisees did. Bruce observes, “A Sadducee could not become a Christian without abandoning a distinctive theological tenet of his party; a Pharisee could become a Christian and remain a Pharisee—in the apostolic age, at least. For believing Pharisees, the Christian faith did not necessarily imply the law-free gospel to which Paul was committed.” In a footnote, he adds, “The common view is that it was not until the final decade of the first century that the conclusive breach between Jewish Christians and other Jews took place when the addition of the *birkat hamminim*, the prayer that “the Nazarenes and the heretics might perish as in a moment and be blotted out of the book of life.”

“Then there arose a loud outcry. And the scribes of the Pharisees’ party arose and protested, saying, ‘We find no evil in this man; but if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him, let us not fight against God’” (23:9). The expression “loud outcry” indicates that this was “passionate excitement,” not “rational; conviction” (Alexander), the response of “a frantic mob” (Rackham). Being carried away by partisanship (Rackham), the Pharisees concluded that Paul had not committed a crime (Alexander) and if his vision (21:14, 17) was from a spirit or an angel, it was from God and they should not fight against God (5:39). They were focusing on, arguing from and defending their own doctrinal position more than defending Paul.

Unbelieving religious leaders cannot only be hypocritical, but they can also be wrong. The fact that their collar is on backward may be an indication that they have some other things backward. When the Pastor of a Lutheran church said that there is truth in all religions, but he preached what the congregation wanted to hear, he was challenged and he should have been.

The Deliverance

“Now when there arose a great dissension, the commander, fearing lest Paul might be pulled to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them, and bring *him* into the barracks” (23:10). The rancor got so bad the Roman commander feared they would pull Paul to pieces. So he ordered his soldiers to seize Paul and take him back to the barracks (22:24), inside the fortress (Alexander).

If need be, the Lord will rescue you.

Summary: When Paul met with Jewish religious leaders, who were hypocrites and wrong about what they taught, he confronted them, they reacted, and he had to be rescued by the Romans. Religious leaders, who are hypocrites and wrong about what they teach, should be confronted.

That does not mean you should go on a crusade, but when the opportunity presents itself, you should be bold enough to confront even religious leaders with their hypocrisy.

Corporate managers were asked if they would voice positions that focused on the good of the company rather than the personal benefit and jeopardized their own careers. The four leader types found in all organizations emerged from this study.

Type #1. Courageous. These people expressed ideas to help the company improve despite personal risk or opposition.

Type #2. Confronting. These people spoke up only because of a personal vendetta against the company.

Type #3. Calloused. These people didn't know or care whether they could do anything for the company; they felt helpless and hopeless, so they kept quiet.

Type #4. Conforming. These people also remained quiet, but only because they loathed confrontation and loved approval.

The researchers discovered that the courageous managers accomplished the most, reported the highest job satisfaction, and eventually were commended by superiors. Their commitment had certainly improved the quality of their lives (Jon Johnston, *Courage - You Can Stand Strong in the Face of Fear*, SP Publications, 1990, pp. 138-139).

“Whatever you do, you need courage. Whatever course you decide upon, someone will always tell you that you are wrong. There are always difficulties arising that tempt you to believe your critics are right. To map out a course of action and follow it to an end requires some of the same courage that a soldier needs. Peace has its victories but takes brave men and women to win them” (Ralph Waldo Emerson).

HOW GOD WORKS

How does God work? It would be safe to assume that God works through His people. Who is opposed to God's work? The world is antagonistic to God's work. One of the shocking things about the way God works is that it is often not how we think. Yeah, it is sometimes the opposite of the way we think.

Communication

Discouragement “But the following night the Lord stood by him and said, ‘Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome’” (23:11). Wiersbe says, “When you read the account of Paul’s days in Jerusalem, you get the impression that everything Paul did failed miserably. His attempt to win over the legalistic Jews only helped cause a riot in the temple, and his witness before the Sanhedrin left the council in confusion. Considering all that had happened to him, Paul might have felt ‘dejected and despondent.’”

“This was one of the darkest nights of Paul’s life. For years, he had hoped to give fruitful witness to Jerusalem. But when he arrived, he found a compromising church full of legalistic believers who held him suspect because of his contact with Gentiles. Now, his hopes of convincing the leadership of his people had gone up in smoke as well. His dreams of effective-testimony to the Jews lay in ashes at his feet, and his vision for successful witness in Rome began to fade too. Paul’s heart ached. He was physically, emotionally, and spiritually tired. Even the most optimistic person can experience a low after a battle (consider Elijah), and Paul was in the depths. As he sat in Antonia, he was utterly humiliated—alone, dejected, dispirited. We all sometimes want to curl up with the biggest blanket we can get, thumb in mouth, and forget the world. What would Christ do for Paul in such a valley?” (Hughes).

The Lord’s Presence At such a moment, the Lord appears to Paul with a twofold message. The night after the incident with the Sanhedrin, the Lord appears to Paul, telling him to be of good courage, The Greek word translated “be of good cheer” means “to be of good courage.” It is as if to say, “Be not troubled or discouraged by this opposition and rejection of your testimony; it is enough that I approve and will reward you” (Alexander).

“Jesus often spoke these words during His earthly ministry. He spoke them to the palsied man (Matt. 9:2) and to the woman who suffered with the hemorrhage (Matt. 9:22). He shouted them to the disciples in the storm (Matt. 14:27) and repeated them in the Upper Room (John 16:33). As God’s people, we can always take courage in times of difficulty because the Lord is with us and will see us through” (Wiersbe). “Though Christ is with his children all the time, He is especially with those who are faithfully serving Him” (Hughes). “When you pass through the waters, I *will be* with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you” (Isa. 43:2).

The Lord’s Will The Lord also tells him that his next assignment is Rome, which is what Paul wanted to do (19:21; Rom. 15:22-29). Paul’s appearance before the emperor would not be to defend himself but to witness (Marshall). There is a principle here, namely, the reward for work is more work. “Faithful witnessing is rewarded by further witnessing” (Maclaren). The Lord did

not say, “You have done well; now rest.” He told Paul, “You have done well in a relatively small place. Your reward is greater work.”

Wiersbe reviews the appearance of the Lord to Paul. “A few years after Paul’s conversion, when Paul’s life was in danger in Jerusalem, Jesus appeared to him in the temple and told him what to do (22:17-21). When Paul was discouraged in Corinth and contemplated going elsewhere, Jesus appeared to him and encouraged him to stay (18:9-10). When Paul was certainly at “low ebb” in his ministry, Jesus appeared again to encourage and instruct him. Paul would later receive encouragement during the storm (27:22-25) and during his trial in Rome (2 Tim. 4:16-17). “Lo, I am with you always” is a great assurance for every situation (Matt. 28:20).” He adds the thought that when fanatics tried to kill him and when government officials ignored him, the Lord was with him, fulfilling His plan to get His faithful servant to Rome.

Augustine said, “Trust the past to the mercy of God, the present to His love, and the future to His providence.”

Circumstances

The Conspiracy “And when it was day, some of the Jews banded together and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.” Now there were more than forty who had formed this conspiracy” (23:12-13). Some of the Jews had plans of their own. More than forty of them decided to kill Paul! They were so serious, they took an oath. The Greek word translated “oath” means “to invoke anathema, to bind oneself under a curse.” Alexander explains it is to pronounce themselves anathema or cursed by God unless they execute their promise. Barclay agrees, “When a man took such a vow, he said, ‘May God curse me if I fail to do this.’” They were so motivated they decided not to eat until they fulfilled their vow. Clearly, these were fanatics, forty, fasting fanatics.

“They came to the chief priests and elders, and said, ‘We have bound ourselves under a great oath that we will eat nothing until we have killed Paul. Now you, therefore, together with the council, suggest to the commander that he be brought down to you tomorrow, as though you were going to make further inquiries concerning him; but we are ready to kill him before he comes near’” (23:14-15). They went to the Chief Priest and the elders with their plan. The group of elders probably did not include Paul’s Pharisaic sympathizers (Bruce). They wanted the Sanhedrin to ask the Roman commander to bring Paul back before them. That would get Paul out of the fortress, which would give them an opportunity to kill him.

The Cousin “So when Paul’s sister’s son heard of their ambush, he went and entered the barracks and told Paul” (23:16). When Paul’s nephew heard about the ambush, he went to the Fortress where Paul was imprisoned and told him of the plot. The friends of prisoners were allowed to bring them food and other small comforts to prisoners (Marshall). Apart from this mention of Paul’s nephew, nothing is known about Paul’s family. Rackham speculates that Paul’s family occupied an influential position “within reach of the information about the secret policy of the high priest” (see also Wiersbe). There were 70 (or 71) members of the Sanhedrin and 40 fasting men, making about 110 who knew. If all of them were married, there were another 110 or so who knew. People talk. In this case, it only took one out of a possible 220. Wiersbe remarks, “Wives do chat with each other, and a secret is something you tell one person at a time.”

The Commander “Then Paul called one of the centurions to *him* and said, ‘Take this young man to the commander, for he has something to tell him’” (23:17). When Paul heard about the conspiracy, he asked one of the guards to take his nephew to the commander.

“So he took him and brought *him* to the commander and said, ‘Paul the prisoner called me to *him* and asked *me* to bring this young man to you. He has something to say to you’” (23:18). The guard did as Paul requested, telling the commander that the young man had something to tell him.

“Then the commander took him by the hand, went aside and asked privately, ‘What is it that you have to tell me?’” (23:19). Taking Paul’s nephew by the hand, the commander stepped to the side so that he could ask in privacy what the young man had to say.

“And he said, ‘The Jews have agreed to ask that you bring Paul down to the council tomorrow, as though they were going to inquire more fully about him. But do not yield to them, for more than forty of them lie in wait for him, men who have bound themselves by an oath that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him; and now they are ready, waiting for the promise from you’” (23:20-21). The young man told the commander about the conspiracy, including the oath of the forty fasting men and the involvement of the Sanhedrin. The plot was to be executed the following day (“tomorrow”). The conspirators didn’t want to fast too long! (Marshall).

“So, the commander let the young man depart, and commanded *him*, ‘Tell no one that you have revealed these things to me’” (23:22). The commander treated what he heard seriously (Bruce). The commander dismissed the young man, telling him not to tell anyone that he had told him about the conspiracy. The prohibition was intended to give the commander time to send Paul away before the zealots discovered that their conspiracy had been uncovered (Alexander).

God used circumstance to protect Paul. The Lord told him he would testify in Jerusalem (23:11). Nothing can harm God’s servants until their work is done. “In June 1926, a young missionary in his mid-twenties, Raymond Edman, fell ill from typhus fever in a mountain village in Ecuador. So grave was his illness that he was carried by train and stretcher from Riobamba to Guayaquil, the port city of Ecuador. Soon, his wife followed. When she arrived at the hospital, the attending North American physician told Mrs. Edman that her husband’s feet were already cold. He would soon die. A fellow missionary ordered a black, cloth-covered coffin for the missionary’s burial. Because Mrs. Edman had no black dress, she had her wedding dress dyed black. They even set the time and date for the funeral, 3 P.M., July 4. Many years later, in 1967, Dr. V. Raymond Edman, the fourth president of Wheaton College, was addressing the student body when he suddenly collapsed after a slow half-turn and moments later passed into the presence of the King of Kings. Dr. Edman had known forty-one years of fruitful service since those dark days in Guayaquil. *God’s servants are immortal until their work is done. No servant of God dies a premature death.* God had a job for Paul to do, and no one or nothing could thwart God’s plans. Christ’s words greatly encouraged Paul, and he never wavered again despite all the immense perils that later came upon him. Christ’s presence beside him, Christ’s galvanizing call to courage, and Christ’s promise of further ministry helped Paul to firmly believe and to keep serving His Lord” (Hughes).

Commander

The Plan “And he called for two centurions, saying, ‘Prepare two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen to go to Caesarea at the third hour of the night and provide

mounts to set Paul on, and bring *him* safely to Felix the governor” (23:23-24). The commander summoned two centurions, ordering them to prepare 470 military personnel: 200 soldiers, 70 horsemen, and 200 spearmen, to take Paul to Felix, the governor in Caesarea, the Roman capital (Marshall). In other words, they were to prepare the infantry, cavalry, and light-armed troops (Bruce). The size of the force was nearly half the Jerusalem garrison (Marshall). They were to leave the third hour, which was nine pm. That hour was enough to escape observation and early enough to give them time to make the journey that night (Alexander; Marshall). The mounts (plural) for Paul were either for his companions (Rackham) or, perhaps, for a change of the animal for Paul (Marshall).

Barclay explains that Felix “began life as a slave. His brother, Pallas, was the favorite of Nero. Through the influence of Pallas, Felix had risen first to be a freedman and then to be a governor. He was the first slave in history ever to become the governor of a Roman province. Tacitus, the Roman historian, said of him, ‘He exercised the prerogatives of a king with the spirit of a slave.’ He had actually been married to three princesses, one after another. The name of the first is not known; the second was a grand-daughter of Anthony and Cleopatra; the third was Drusilla, the daughter of Herod Agrippa the first. He was completely unscrupulous and was capable of hiring thugs to murder his own closest supporters. It was to face a man like that that Paul went to Caesarea.” His contemporaries described Felix as cruel, avaricious, and licentious (Alexander).

The Letter “He wrote a letter in the following manner: Claudius Lysias, to the most excellent governor Felix: Greetings” (23:25-26). The commander also wrote a letter to Felix. The letter began with the usual salutation in ancient letters. The salutation of an ancient letter consisted of an identification of the author, an identification of the recipient, and a greeting. From this salutation, the name of the commander is stated for the first time. Claudius was his Roman name and Lysias was his Greek name (Bruce).

“The Jews seized this man and was about to be killed by them. Coming with the troops I rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman” (23:27). Claudius explains that Paul had been seized by the Jews and was about to be killed when he, discovering that Paul was a Roman citizen, rescued him. That is not exactly the way it happened. It was after he had ordered Paul tortured that he discovered he was a Roman citizen (22:22-29). The episode of the ordered flogging was “discreetly omitted” (Bruce). The commander twisted the truth slightly in his favor (Marshall). The letter was a distortion (Rackham). Claudius put himself in the best possible light (Wiersbe).

“And when I wanted to know the reason they accused him, I brought him before their council” (23:28). Claudius explains he brought Paul before the Sanhedrin because he wanted to know why they accused him.

“I found out that he was accused concerning questions of their law, but had nothing charged against him deserving of death or chains” (23:29). Claudius says that what he discovered was the Sanhedrin accused Paul of violations of the Mosaic Law (Alexander). He did not find a charge of a crime or anything that would warrant imprisonment or execution. This is another “official statement” from a Roman official recorded by Luke proving Christians were not considered criminals (Wiersbe, who cites 16:35-40; 18:14-15; 19:40; 25:24-25; 26:31-32; 28:21).

“And when it was told me that the Jews lay in wait for the man, I sent him immediately to you, and also commanded his accusers to state before you the charges against him. Farewell” (23:30). Claudius concludes that when he was told about a conspiracy to kill Paul, he sent Paul to

Felix and informed the accusers that they would have to state their charges before him. “Farwell” is an unusual conclusion (Alexander).

The Transfer “Then the soldiers, as they were commanded, took Paul and brought *him* by night to Antipatris” (23:31). As ordered by Claudius (23:23-24), the military contingent of 470 men escorted Paul to Antipatris, a city 35 miles from Jerusalem and 27 miles from Caesarea (Rackham; Bruce; Marshall says it was 37 miles from Jerusalem and 25 miles from Caesarea).

“The next day they left the horsemen to go on with him, and returned to the barracks. When they came to Caesarea and had delivered the letter to the governor, they also presented Paul to him” (23:32-33). The trip to Antipatris took all night. For the infantry, it was a forced march (Bruce; Wiersbe). The next day the 200 soldiers and, although not mentioned, probably the 200 spearmen returned to Jerusalem (Alexander). Barclay explains, “Up to Antipatris, the country was dangerous and inhabited by Jews; after that, the country was open and flat, quite unsuited for any ambush and largely inhabited by Gentiles. So at Antipatris, the main body of the troops went back and left the cavalry alone as a sufficient escort.” The 70 horsemen escorted Paul to Caesarea.

The Discussion “And when the governor had read *it*, he asked what province he was from. And when he understood that *he was* from Cilicia, he said, ‘I will hear you when your accusers also have come.’ And he commanded him to be kept in Herod’s Praetorium” (23:34-35). Felix read the letter and asked what province Paul was from to make sure Paul’s case fell under his jurisdiction (Rackham; Lk. 23:7). Paul was from a province whose governor was Felix’s superior. Felix was “competent” to deal with Paul (Bruce). When Felix heard Paul was from the Roman province of Cilicia, he decided to hold Paul in Herod’s Praetorium until his accusers came. The Praetorium was the governor’s palace (Rackham). An escort fit for a king protected Paul, and he was put up in the palace instead of in an ordinary prison (Wiersbe).

The prophecy of Agabus had been fulfilled (21:10-14). The Lord used the commander, an unsaved person, to protect Paul! Spurgeon said, “Let us trust in God and be very courageous for the gospel and the Lord Himself will screen us from harm.”

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Summary: The Lord encourages us through His Word, circumstances, and unsaved people.

Barclay points out the lengths to which the Jews would go to eliminate Paul and the lengths to which the Roman government would go to administer impartial justice. He adds, “It is strange how the fanatical hatred of the Jews—God’s chosen people—contrasts with the impartial justice of the commander—a heathen in Jewish eyes.”

What happened to the conspirators? Most agree they probably got out of their oath. Rackham says it would not have been difficult for doctors of the law to declare it null and void. Bruce points out that the Mishnah provides for relief from such a vow (*Nedarim* 3.13.).

The Lord sometimes uses unlikely means to get His work done. We have to be obedient, but God does the work. “Paderewski, the famous composer-pianist, was scheduled to perform at a great concert hall in America. It was an evening to remember—a black tux-long-evening dress, high-society extravaganza. In the audience that evening sat a mother with her fidgety nine-year-old son. Weary of waiting for the concert to begin, the lad constantly squirmed in his seat. His mother hoped her boy would be encouraged to practice the piano once he heard the immortal Paderewski. That is why, against his wishes, he was there.

“When his mother turned to talk with some friends, the impatient boy could stay seated no longer. He slipped away from her side, strangely drawn to the ebony concert grand Steinway and its leather tufted stool on the huge stage flooded with brilliant lights. Largely ignored by the

sophisticated audience, the boy sat down at the stool, staring wide-eyed at the black and white keys. He placed his small, trembling fingers in the right location and began to play ‘Chopsticks.’ The roar of the crowd quickly ceased as hundreds of frowning faces turned in his direction. Irritated and embarrassed, they began to shout at the bold youngster.

“Backstage, the master, overhearing the sounds, hurriedly grabbed his coat and rushed toward the stage, where he stood behind the boy and began to improvise a countermelody to harmonize with and enhance ‘Chopsticks.’ As the two of them played together, Paderewski kept whispering in the boy’s ears, ‘Keep going. Do not quit, son. Keep on playing. Do not stop. Do not quit’” (Hughes).

HOW TO DEFEND YOURSELF

At some time or another, all of us have to defend ourselves. As children, we had to defend ourselves against an accusation from a sibling or a friend. It happens in marriage, at work, and in ministry. Many do not handle it properly. They react and get defensive. How should it be done?

The Accusation

The Committee “Now after five days Ananias the high priest came down with the elders and a certain orator named Tertullus. These gave evidence to the governor against Paul” (24:1). After five days, a committee, consisting of the High Priest (23:2), elders, that is, some of the members of the Sanhedrin (Marshall), and an orator named Tertullus arrived to testify before Felix against Paul. They wasted no time! (Rackham). Tertullus was their spokesman, perhaps, like their attorney who would speak for them in court (24:2; Marshall). Rackham says since he was a Roman, he was familiar with the law, brief, and to the point (24:4). Bruce thinks he was a Hellenistic Jew. Marshall says he was presumably a Jew, but not necessarily.

The Charges “And when he was called upon, Tertullus began his accusation, saying: “Seeing that through you we enjoy great peace, and prosperity is being brought to this nation by your foresight, we accept it always and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness” (24:2-3). Tertullus began his speech before Felix, thanking him for the peace and prosperity they experienced under his leadership. What Tertullus said was a favorite form of flattery (Alexander). Actually, Felix’s administration had been characterized by unrest (Marshall). During his governorship, “insurrections and anarchy dramatically increased throughout Palestine because of his brutality” (Hughes). The reference to peace is perhaps to prepare the way for his attack on Paul as a disturber of the peace (Marshall).

Wiersbe says, “Tertullus began with the customary *flattery*, a normal part of the judicial routine. After all, before you can win your case, you must win over your judge. Tacitus, the Roman orator and politician, called flatterers ‘those worst of enemies;’ and Solomon wrote that ‘a flattering mouth works ruin’ (Prov. 26:28 NKJV). The lawyer complimented Felix because the governor’s many reforms had brought quietness to the land. (Question: Why did it require nearly 500 soldiers to protect one man in transit from Jerusalem to Caesarea?) It was true that Felix had put down some revolts, but he had certainly not brought peace to the land. In fact, while Felix was suppressing robbers in his realm, he was also hiring robbers to murder the high priest Jonathan! So much for his reforms.”

Barclay says Tertullus began with “almost nauseating flattery, every word he and Felix knew was untrue. He went on to state equally untrue things. He claimed that the Jews had arrested Paul. The scene in the Temple court was far closer to being a lynching than an arrest. The charge he leveled against Paul was subtly inaccurate.”

“Nevertheless, not to be tedious to you any further, I beg you to hear, by your courtesy, a few words from us” (24:4). Tertullus asked Felix to hear him “with courtesy.” The Greek word translated “courtesy” means “fairness, gentleness, moderation.” Matthew Arnold rendered it “sweet reasonableness” (A-S). Alexander says that the essential idea is not so much kindness or

gentleness as fairness and reasonableness, freedom from extremes of every kind. He adds, “a particular judicial virtue.”

“For we have found this man a plague, a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. He even tried to profane the temple” (24:5-6a). Tertullus explains (“for”) the Jewish charges against Paul. There are three charges. Rackham says Paul is charged with three counts: one political, one religious, and one was a particular breach of the law (25:8). Wiersbe says the three were a personal charge (pestilent fellow), a political charge (sedition and leading an illegal religion), and a doctrinal charge (profaning the temple). Alexander calls the three charges sedition, schism, and sacrilege.

Paul is charged with being a plague, that is, with strife. The Greek word translated “plague” means “pestilence, pest” (A-S), “plague” (Alexander). It is a common figure in all languages for one who is troublesome (Alexander). He was a public nuisance (Rackham; Marshall).

More specifically, Paul is charged with being a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world. The Greek word translated “dissension” means “insurrection, sedition, strife, dissension.” Paul did not intend to cause riots, but that was the result of his preaching. Alexander says Paul was accused of sowing strife among the Jews and rousing them against the Romans (He cites 16:20-21; 17:6-7; 18:13, 21.). Peaceful advocates of controversial points of view find themselves the unwilling cause of mob action (Marshall). Barclay says Paul is being charged with being “a fomenter of troubles and a pest. That classed Paul with those insurrectionaries who continually inflamed the inflammable populace into rebellion. Tertullus well knew that the one thing that tolerant Rome would not stand was civil disorder, for any spark might become a flame. Tertullus knew it was a lie, but it was an effective charge.”

Paul is charged with being a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes, that is, with schism. Alexander says that believers were called Nazarenes until after the destruction of Jerusalem, when it became the name of a Christian sect that still adhered to the Mosaic Law. The most probable explanation for the name is that it was first applied to Jesus because His hometown was Nazareth and from Him, it came to be used of His followers (Bruce). The Nazarenes were a Jewish sect with no legal status, yet violating Jewish law (Rackham). Barclay says that being charged with being a leader of the sect of the Nazarenes “coupled Paul with Messianic movements, and the Romans knew what havoc false Messiahs could cause and how they could whip the people into hysterical risings which were only settled at the cost of blood. Rome could not afford to disregard a charge like that. Again, Tertullus knew it was a lie, but it was an effective charge.”

Paul is charged with trying to profane the Temple, that is, with sacrilege. To profane the Temple was to make it “accessible, depriving it of its consecration, making (it) common” (Alexander). The charge changed from actually doing it (21:28) to trying to do it (24:6). If Paul had actually done this, he would have been handed over to the Sanhedrin (Bruce). Barclay says Paul is being charged with being a defiler of the Temple. The priests were Sadducees, the collaborationist party; to defile the Temple was to infringe the rights and laws of the priests; and the Romans, Tertullus hoped, would take the side of the pro-Roman party. The charge was the most dangerous of things—a series of half-truths and of twisted facts.”

The Consequences “and we seized him, and wanted to judge him according to our law, but the commander Lysias came by and with great violence took *him* out of our hands, commanding his accusers to come to you” (24:6b-8a). Pointing out that some claim these words (24:6b-24:8a) were imported into the Received Text from the Western Text, Bruce says, however, the tone is “so thoroughly in accord with the rest of Tertullus’s speech that one is inclined to accept it as

genuine.” Tertullus continues, relating how they arrested Paul and wanted to judge him according to Jewish law, but the Roman commander stepped in to take Paul out of their hands. Alexander points out that their wish to try Paul is “wholly at variance with the fact that they were beating him to death” when Lysias rescued him (21:31-32). For example, compare “great violence” (24:7) with the description of the arrest in Acts 21:27-36 (Bruce). Tertullus adds that Lysias commanded Paul’s accusers to appear before Felix.

“By examining him yourself you may ascertain all these things of which we accuse him. And the Jews also assented, maintaining that these things were so” (24:8-9). Tertullus suggests that Felix can ascertain the accuracy of their accusations by the Jewish witnesses who will attest to what is being asserted. The Jewish witnesses would include the High Priest and the elder who were present (Alexander).

Like Paul, all of us have had accusations hurled at us. The question is, “How do you defend yourself?” Most get defensive.

The Answer

Introduction “Then Paul, after the governor had nodded to him to speak, answered: “Inasmuch as I know that you have been for many years a judge of this nation” (24:10a). When Tertullus concluded, Felix nodded for Paul to speak. As Paul began to speak, he did not flatter him (24:2-3), rather, he acknowledged that Felix had been a judge for many years. Felix had been governor for six years (Alexander). Felix’s experience would enable him to assess the charges (Bruce) accurately. Wiersbe says Paul answers the charge of Tertullus (24:10-16), the Asian Jews (24:17-19), and the Jewish council (24:20-21).

His Denial “I do the more cheerfully answer for myself because you may ascertain that it is no more than twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem to worship” (24:10-11). Paul goes straight to the specific charge with which Tertullus concluded his speech (Marshall). Paul tells Felix that he cheerfully answers the accusations against him because, as Felix himself knows, it has been no more than 12 days since he went to Jerusalem to worship. Three of the twelve were spent in prison (Bruce). In other words, his recent arrival in the country left no time for such proceedings that were being hurled against him. Furthermore, he went to Jerusalem to worship, not to cause a disturbance. By worship, Paul means he went to the Temple to give thanks (Marshall). In the Bible is an act with an attitude. The word’s basic meaning is to bow down, to do obeisance. The act is bowing; the attitude is honor. It has nothing to do with music.

“And they neither found me in the temple disputing with anyone nor inciting the crowd, either in the synagogues or in the city” (24:12). Paul also (“and”) cheerfully answers for himself because he can say that they did not find him in the Temple disputing with anyone, nor did they find him exciting the crowd in the synagogue or in the city (24:5). This categorical denial could never have been made in the presence of accusers capable of proving their charge. Thus, this statement is tantamount to a denial that the charges could be proven at all (Alexander).

Earlier, Luke described Paul’s custom: “Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and *saying*, ‘This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ’” (Acts 17:2-3). The Greek word translated “reasoned” in Acts 17:2 is the same one rendered “disputing” in Acts 24:12. Clearly, Paul had not conducted himself according to this custom when he was in Jerusalem. He had not come to Jerusalem to evangelize. By the terms of

a prior agreement (Gal. 2:7-9), he would not have engaged in evangelism in Jerusalem unless the Jerusalem church had invited him to do so (Marshall).

“Nor can they prove the things of which they now accuse me” (24:13). Alexander says it is as if Paul says, “Since I have been only twelve days in Jerusalem, and during that time they have found me nowhere publicly or privately exhibiting the character which they would fasten on me, as a mover of sedition and a sower of dissension among the Jews throughout the world, I am entitled to conclude that they have no proof to adduce of that calumnious description, or of any charge which they have brought against me.” Paul simply denies the charge of being “a creator of dissension” (24:5). He did not have enough time in Jerusalem to organize a riot. His accusers did not find him causing a riot, and they could not prove that he had done so. Their charge could not be sustained by evidence (Marshall).

His Confession “But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets” (24:14). For the expression “the Way,” see comments on Acts 9:2. Paul, who once persecuted those of the Way (9:2) is now a member! Having answered one of the charges, namely, that he caused dissensions, Paul now answers the second charge that he was a “ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes” (24:5). “Thus far he had denied and contradicted; now he comes to acknowledge and confess” (Alexander). Paul admits that he is a “Nazarene” but denies he is guilty of apostasy from Moses (Alexander). He claims he worships the same God and believes all that is written in their Scriptures. The Greek word translated “worship” means “to serve, worship.” The Greek verb comes from a noun that means “hired servant.”

“I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust” (24:15). Paul tells Felix that he still worships the same God, still believes in the same books and still cherishes the same future as the Jews (Alexander). More specifically, he believes in the resurrection of the dead, which implies the resurrection of the Messiah, which Paul gets to in his defense before Agrippa (26:23).

“This being so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men” (24:16). Paul claims he strives to have a conscience that is neither wounded by transgression nor allows him to be the means of tempting others he is a conscientious and consistent Jew (Alexander). His conscience detects no faults (Marshall).

Paul confesses that he is a follower of the Way, but he is not guilty of apostasy from Moses; He believes all that is written in the Law and the Prophets.

His Conduct “Now after many years I came to bring alms and offerings to my nation” (24:17). Having defined his position as a Jew, Paul reverts to the purpose for his visit to Jerusalem. He came to dispense alms and offerings (19:21; 22:20; Rom. 15:25-31; 1 Cor. 16:1-4, 10, 11. 17; 2 Cor. 8:1-24; 9:1-15). What is the difference between alms and offerings? Alms are gifts of charity. If “offering” is taken literally, it could be an animal sacrifice, which is not at all likely. The word “offerings” could also be figurative. It might be nothing more than a specific of the phrase “worship” (24:11), or since the same word is used about the sacrifices of the Nazarites (11:26), it could be a reference to the cost of purification which he had undertaken (21:23-26; Alexander; Rackham; Marshall). Bruce says Paul’s “gift was a tribute of thanksgiving to God and a donation for the relief of his people.” At any rate, this point is to establish his loyalty.

“in the midst of which some Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with a mob nor with tumult” (24:18). In the midst of the very acts that proved his devotion to Israel, the Jews seized him. He was not part of a mob, nor was he causing tumult. The Greek word translated “tumult” means “noise, uproar, tumult,” as of an excited mob (20:1, 21:34). Paul

contends that his conduct demonstrated that he was doing nothing wrong. He certainly was not causing a disturbance. “How could he be *worshipping* God and *profaning* God’s house at the same time?” (Wiersbe, italic his).

His Challenge “They ought to have been here before you to object if they had anything against me” (24:19). The fact that his accusers were not present shows the unfairness and the irregularity of the whole process (Alexander). There was no evidence against Paul. His real crime was that he was a consistent Christian (Rackham). According to Wiersbe, Roman law required that the accusers face the accused at trial or the charges would be dropped.

“Or else let those who are *here* themselves say if they found any wrongdoing in me while I stood before the council” (24:20). The alternative would be to have those who were present say if they found any wrongdoing when he was before the Council (23:1-10).

“unless *it is* for this one statement which I cried out, standing among them, ‘Concerning the resurrection of the dead I am being judged by you this day’” (24:21). Paul suggests that the reason he is standing before Felix is his statement concerning the resurrection of the dead when it was before the council (23:7). The only crime with which they could charge was proclaiming the resurrection of the dead, which was no crime at all (Bruce). The point is not so much what he said as they having said so little to justify their conduct (Alexander).

Paul denied the specific charges against him, explained what he did, and challenged his opponents to prove their case. Paul calmly and reasonably denied the charges without reacting. Barclay points out that Paul defended himself, but “never with the self-pity or bitterness that would have been so natural in a man whose finest actions had been so cruelly and deliberately misinterpreted.”

In 1952, when Richard Nixon was a United States senator from California and was being considered for vice President, he was accused of improprieties relating to a fund established by his backers to reimburse him for his political expenses. On September 23, 1952, he went on radio and television to deliver a half-hour address in which he defended himself. He gave a detailed denial of the charges but said he intended to keep one gift: a black-and-white dog named “Checkers” by his children, thus giving the address its popular name. Nixon’s speech was heard by about 60 million Americans and led to an outpouring of public support for him.

The Decision

To Wait “But when Felix heard these things, having more accurate knowledge of *the Way*, he adjourned the proceedings and said, ‘When Lysias the commander comes down, I will make a decision on your case’” (24:22). For the expression “the Way,” see comments on Acts 9:2. Having some personal knowledge of Christianity, Felix decided to adjourn the proceedings with the explanation that he would decide the case when Lysias, the commander, came. Alexander suggests that Felix saw that the charges were false and frivolous, but he did not want to openly acquit Paul, which would have been an affront to the Jews. Furthermore, he had personal and selfish reasons for doing what he did (24:27). Marshall calls the case flimsy and feeble.

“So he commanded the centurion to keep Paul and to let *him* have liberty, and told him not to forbid any of his friends to provide for or visit him” (24:23). Felix commended the centurion to detain Paul but also allowed him to have liberty so his friends could provide for him and visit him, which, no doubt, included Luke (Rackham). Rackham says Paul was probably chained by the arm to a soldier and placed under surveillance but otherwise was free in the sense of his friends having access to him.

To Hear Paul “And after some days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, he sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ” (24:24). According to Josephus, Drusilla was the daughter of Herod Antipas (12:23) and the great-granddaughter of Herod the Great. Out of jealousy of her sister Bernice, a rival beauty, she abandoned her husband for Felix (Rackham). Rackham estimates Drusilla was 17 or 18 years old (Bruce says she was not yet twenty). Wiersbe says, “Her great-grandfather tried to kill Jesus in Bethlehem (Matt. 2); her great-uncle killed John the Baptist and mocked Jesus (Luke 23:6-12); and Acts 12:1-2 tells of her father killing the Apostle James.” Being Jewish, perhaps Drusilla was naturally curious about this strange sect. At any rate, Felix, with his wife, sent for Paul to hear him concerning faith in Christ.

“Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, ‘Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you’” (24:25). When Paul arrived, he reasoned with Felix and Drusilla concerning righteousness, self-control, and judgment to come. For the Greek word “reasoned,” see comments on Acts 17:2. Alexander renders “reasoned” as “discoursing.” Wiersbe says Paul deals with yesterday’s sin (righteousness), today’s temptation (self-control), and tomorrow’s judgment. (For more on this verse, see the chapter entitled “Procrastination.”)

When Felix heard what Paul had to say, he was afraid. The Greek word translated “afraid” means “terrible, fear, terrified.” Paul saw the terror in Felix’s eyes (Hughes). Felix sent Paul away, saying he would hear him at a more convenient time. If I told you had serious heart trouble, would you wait for a more convenient time to go see a doctor?

To Hold Paul “Meanwhile he also hoped that Paul would give money him, that he might release him. Therefore, he sent for him more often and conversed with him” (24:26). Since Felix hoped that a bribe would be forthcoming to release Paul, Felix sent for Paul often to converse with him. Felix knew about the foreign funds Paul had brought with him as alms (24:17; see Bruce).

“But after two years Porcius Festus succeeded Felix; and Felix, wanting to do the Jews a favor, left Paul bound” (24:27). These conversations extended over two years. Wanting to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul bound. After two years, Festus succeeded Felix. Justice was forgotten; Felix allowed the case to drag on indefinitely in the hope of a bribe (Marshall). Paul was trapped. Felix was in no hurry to sit for a second hearing; he was waiting for a bribe. The Jews did not press for it, because they had a bad case and their relationship with Felix became more and more strained (Rackham). For some reason, Lysias did not show up.

Paul used an unfair situation to share the gospel with Felix (24:26).

Summary: When falsely accused, Paul defended himself by denying the charges, demonstrating his innocence, demanding proof of the accusation against him, and using the opportunity to share the gospel.

This episode is obviously about Paul’s defense before Felix. It has something to say about Paul and Felix. One of the reasons Luke wrote Acts was to demonstrate that there was no substance to the charge of subversion brought against Paul and Christians. Competent and impartial judges repeatedly confirmed the innocence of the Christian movement concerning Roman law (Bruce).

Paul was a light. When asked, “What is it like to be a Christian?” a woman replied, “It is like being a pumpkin. God picks you from the patch, brings you in, and washes all the dirt off of you. Then He cuts off the top and scoops out all the yucky stuff. He removes the seeds of doubt, hate,

and greed. Then He carves you a new smiling face and puts His light inside of you to shine for all the world to see.”

This episode records what Felix did. Wiersbe outlines this chapter as follows: False accusation (24:1-9), Faithful answer (24:10-21), and Foolish attitude (24:22-27). Felix procrastinated. Procrastination is a potentially fatal mistake. In the case of hearing the truth about salvation, procrastination usually results in putting the truth out of mind. Having rejected it once, it becomes easier and easier to put it off again and again. Repeated rejection results in what the Scripture calls the hardness of the heart. An English proverb says, “One of these days is none of these days.” “It is always the right time to do the right thing” (Hughes).

When asked to define conscience, pointing to his heart, an Indian said, “It is a little three-cornered thing in here. When I do wrong, it turns around and hurts very much. If I keep on doing wrong, it will turn until it wears the edges all off, and then it will not hurt anymore.”

WHAT IS IN A NAME?

If someone were to ask you, “Who are you?” meaning, who are you spiritually or religiously, what would you say? What name would you use to identify yourself? One possible answer is, “I am a Christian.” In the broadest sense of the term, that would mean that you’re saying that you are not Jewish or Muslim. The problem is there are many different types of Christians. Are you a Catholic or Protestant? Another possibility is to say, “I am a Protestant.” In that sense, you are saying you are not a Roman Catholic. The difficulty with that answer is there are different types of Protestants. Are You Baptist, Methodist, or Presbyterian? Another answer would be to say, “I am a Baptist,” which would mean that you are not a Presbyterian, a Methodist, or a Lutheran. That answer may sound like it solves the problem, but it does not for the simple reason there are a number of different Baptists. There are American Baptist, Southern Baptist, Regular Baptist, General Baptist, Reformed Baptist, Free Will Baptist, Seventh Day Baptist, Conservative Baptist, Bible Baptist, Primitive Baptist, Progressive Baptist, Progressive Primitive Baptist, and Duck River (and Kindred) Baptist, etc. *The Handbook of the Denominations in the United States* lists 31 different organized groups of Baptists.

Who are we? By what name should we call ourselves? What is our biblical name? I would like to answer that question primarily from the book of Acts.

Christian

Nickname Luke informs us that “The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch” (11:26). The word “Christian” only appears three times in the New Testament (11:26 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16). Christian was not a name that the disciples choice for themselves. It was a nickname others gave them (see notes on Acts 11:26). Barclay says, “The people of Antioch were famous for their facility in finding jesting nicknames. Later, the bearded Emperor Julian visited them and they christened him ‘The Goat.’ He also says, ‘Christian’ was a “contemptuous nickname” (Barclay on Acts 11:26).

The Meaning Barclay explains that the termination *-iani* means *belonging to the party of*; for instance, *Caesariani* means *belonging to Caesar’s party*. Christian means *These Christ-folk*.”

The Problem Today, some consider themselves Christians because they are not “pagans” (Wiersbe). Some think that everyone who is not a Jew or a Muslim is a Christian.

Be all that as it may, note that Christian implies a group of people. We use the names of individuals. While that is not necessarily wrong, at the same time, it also implies being part of a group. My name is Michael Cocoris. Michael is my personal. Cocoris is my family name. You may call me “Cocoris” to refer to me personally, but that name indicates that I am part of a family named “Cocoris.”

Disciples

The Name Throughout the book, Luke calls people “disciples” (for example, 11:26), disciples of the Lord (9:1). In the book of Acts, the words “disciple” and “disciples” appear over 30 times.

The Meaning The Greek word translated “disciple” means “learner, pupil.” It assumes a teacher. In secular Greek, “disciple” was the usual word for apprentice. Plato called the man learning to play the flute a disciple. The doctor in training under an experienced physician was a disciple (TDNT, vol. 4, p. 416). A disciple, then, was someone who bound himself to a teacher in order to acquire theoretical and practical knowledge. He was an apprentice in a trade, a student of medicine, or a member of a philosophical school (TDNT, vol. 4, p. 484). The goal of the disciple was to gain information and aptitudes under expert direction to become a teacher himself (TDNT, vol. 4, p. 488).

Moreover, in Acts, the term “disciple” designates those who are connected with a church (Acts 8:1; 9:1; 11:26). Hodges says, in Acts, the word “disciple” is the standard way to describe those who have become part of a local church (Hodges, p. 41). Luter agrees, saying that in Acts, the plural “disciples” is frequently used to describe the same group elsewhere referred to as the church (Luter, p. 269).

From a New Testament point of view, you cannot be a disciple without being baptized and being taught (Mt. 28:19). Note that in Acts 11:26, the word “disciples” refers to those who were being taught: “And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that they assembled with the church for a whole year and taught many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch” (11:26). Imbedded in the concept is the idea of being taught *in a group*. Notice what Luke says in Acts 14, “strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting *them* to continue in the faith, and *saying*, ‘We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God’” (14:22; see also 18:23). The word “disciples” is in the plural.

The distinguishing characteristic of Christians should be love. Jesus says, “By this, all will know that you are My disciples if you have love for one another” (Jn. 13:35). That can only be done in a group.

Problem One of the problems is with the word “disciple” is that it is not used in the epistles. Moreover, it is used today of a denomination. Be all that as it may, in the New Testament, it is used of learning in a group.

There has been a controversy over a set of CDs for babies entitled *Babies Einstein*. Evidently, the producers of the CDs claim that they will help educate babies, but others say they don’t. A psychologist interviewed about the controversy said, “Babies learn in a relationship, and these CDs are not a relationship.” Spiritual babies learn in a relationship. When it comes to rearing spiritual children, it takes a church.

The Way

Nazarenes In Acts 24, accusing Paul before Felix, Tertullus said, “For we have found this man a plague, a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes” (24:5). Paul is charged with being a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. Nazarene is a term of reproach (Rackham on 11:26). As we have seen, the name Nazarenes was used of a Christian sect that still adhering the Mosaic Law.

The Way Paul’s response is, “But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets” (24:14). He seems to be rejecting the name Nazarene preferring the name of “the Way.”

As was noted in the comments on Acts 9:2, in the book of Acts, Luke uses the expression “the Way” several times (19:9; 19:23; 22:4; 24:14; 24:22) and he uses such expressions as a way

of God (18:25), the way of the Lord (18:26), and the way of salvation (16:17). I have also pointed out that the Way is another name for the Christian religion (Alexander on 19:9; Marshall on 22:4; Hodges) and a “new way of life” (Alexander; Bruce on 9:2; Barclay on 18:26). It is the way of salvation, thinking and living (Alexander on 19:23). It is a way of thinking, living, worshipping, etc.

In thinking, they believed (24:14-15). They believed that Jesus was the Messiah, which means He is the Son of God, who died for sin and rose from the dead. In living, they eat together (20:7).

Perhaps it includes their observance of the love feast and the practice of baptism. “Now on the first *day* of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight” (20:7). Rackham points out that after the close of the Sabbath, the Jew generally celebrated with a festive meal. Rackham contends that there was a separation between the love feast and the Eucharist in Bithynia in the days of Pliny (110 AD). According to Pliny, believers met before dawn to sing to Christ as to God and to bind themselves by a solemn oath not to commit a crime. Then, after separating, they came together again to partake in food (see Rackham on 20:7).

Summary: In the book of Acts, the names of followers of Christ all involve being part of a group. What is in any name by which we are called is involvement in a group.

Outside of the book of Acts, many names are used of Christ’s followers, including saints, servants, and brethren. Different protestant denominations have taken their names from the Scripture, including the Children of God, the Church of God, the Assemblies of God, the Churches of Christ, the Disciples of Christ, etc. Frankly, the name is not the issue. A rose by any other name would still be a rose. The issue is that we realize that who we are involves being connected to one another.

You cannot be a Christian in isolation. Some Christians act like they are in a witness protection program: they don’t want their real identity to be known. They act as if they are part of the secret service. Don’t be like the Lone Ranger.

That reminds me of a joke. As the Lone Ranger and Tonto rode together, the Lone Ranger noticed a tribe of Indians riding toward them. The Lone Ranger said, “Tonto Indians are coming from the north; let us ride to the south. As they did, they encountered another group of Indians coming from the south, so Lone Ranger said, “Look, they are coming; ride to the west. The same thing happened with the same reaction from the Lone Ranger, only this time he said, let’s ride to the east. When the Lone Ranger saw Indians coming from the east, he exclaimed, “Tonto, what do we do now?” Tonto replied, “What do you mean ‘we’ pale face.” Perhaps I should say don’t be Tonto. When trouble comes, it is no time to be alone.

Be part of a church. You do not marry a person; you marry a family. You do not buy a house; you buy a neighborhood. You do not become a Christian in isolation; you become part of a church.

You need examples to follow. Paul wrote to the Philippians, “Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Therefore, let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern” (Phil. 3:13-17). Paul told the Philippians to follow his example, “For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell

you even weeping, *that they are* the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end *is* destruction, whose god *is their* belly, and *whose* glory *is* in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things” (Phil. 3:18-19).

Alexander the Great learned that a man was named after him. The other “Alexander” was a notorious coward. Alexander the Great called the soldier before him and said, “Is your name Alexander and are you named for me?” The trembling soldier replied, “Yes, sir, my name is Alexander, and I was named after you.” The great general said, “Then either be brave or change your name.”

PROCRASTINATION

Can you think of something you should be doing and have put off doing? The putting off of something that should be done now is called “procrastination.”

The Request

Felix Paul was arrested in Jerusalem and, from there, was taken to Caesarea, where he defended himself before the Roman Governor Felix. Luke records Felix’s decision. “But when Felix heard these things, having more accurate knowledge of *the Way*, he adjourned the proceedings and said, “When Lysias the commander comes down, I will make a decision on your case” (24:22). Felix decided to wait for the arrival of Lysias the Roman commander, who had rescued and arrested Paul in the first place. Luke points out that Felix had more accurate knowledge of “the Way,” that is, of Christianity. Felix no doubt saw that the charges against Paul were frivolous, but he did not want to release Paul, for fear it would stir up the Jews. Besides, he had a selfish motive in mind (24:27). In the meantime, he at least gave Paul the freedom to have his friends visit him (24:23).

“After some days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, he sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ” (24:24). Felix had some accurate knowledge concerning Christianity, but he and his wife wanted to know more. So he called for Paul to tell him more.

Paul As requested, Paul came and “reasoned about righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come (24:25a). To fully appreciate what Paul does, recall what was pointed out earlier, namely, during his administration, Felix had been brutal, even hiring robbers to murder the high priest. His wife, Drusilla, was an interesting lady, to say the least. Wiersbe says, “Her great-grandfather tried to kill Jesus in Bethlehem (Matt. 2); her great-uncle killed John the Baptist and mocked Jesus (Luke 23:6-12); and Acts 12:1-2 tells of her father killing the Apostle James.” When she was about 17 or 18, she left her husband to marry Felix.

Paul reasoned with them about righteousness. Tacitus, the Roman historian, uses two of the strongest words afforded by his language to describe the moral character of Felix, whose life was one of unjust tyranny and sexual indulgence (Alexander). When Drusilla was only sixteen, Felix, with the help of a magician named Atomos, persuaded her to leave her husband to be his wife (Bruce; Barclay). Rackham says she was another man’s wife (Rackham).

Wiersbe says, “We talk about mistakes, weaknesses, inherited tendencies, faults, and even errors, but we do not face up to the fact of sin. ‘People are no longer sinful,’ said Phyllis McGinley, a noted American writer and poet. ‘They are only immature, underprivileged, frightened, or sick.’ But a holy God demands righteousness; that’s the bad news. Yet the good news is that this same holy God *provides* His own righteousness to those who trust Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:21-26).”

Paul reasoned with them about self-control. Wiersbe says, “Man can control almost everything but himself. Here were Felix and Drusilla, prime illustrations of lack of self-control. She divorced her husband to become Felix’s third wife, and though a Jewess, she lived as though God had never given the Ten Commandments at Sinai. Felix was an unscrupulous official who

did not hesitate to lie or *even* murder to get rid of his enemies and promote himself. Self-control was something neither of them knew much about.”

Paul reasoned with them about judgment (17:31). In other words, Paul warned them that they were not going to escape divine accountability (Hughes).

What is Paul doing? Is he telling them that they must be righteous and exercise self-control and order to avoid future judgment?

Jesus According to Jesus, it is the job of the Holy Spirit to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. Jesus said, “And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment because the ruler of this world is judged” (Jn. 16:8-11).

The rich, young ruler asked Jesus, “Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?” (Mk. 10:17; Mt. 19:16-30; Lk. 18:18-30). Jesus answered the question with a question, “Why do you call Me good? No one *is* good but One, *that is*, God” (Mk. 10:18). In other words, Jesus is asking the man if he recognizes who He (Jesus) is. The young man did not answer the question Jesus asked him.

When there was no response, Jesus said, “You know the commandments” (Mk. 10:19). Notice Jesus did not tell the young man to keep the commandments. He simply said you *know* the commandments. Also, note that Jesus only quotes the last six of the Ten Commandments. The first four of the Ten Commandments concern people’s relationship to God. The last six deal with people’s relationships with each other. In citing only the last six, Jesus focuses on the young man’s relationship with people. In other words, having tried the God-ward approach (Jesus is God), Jesus employs the man-ward approach. He is using the law lawfully (1 Tim. 1:8-9). He is attempting to show the young man that he is a sinner because he has broken God’s laws about his relationship with people.

So, Jesus is saying that to obtain eternal life, people must know who He is and who they are. In this case, since the young man did not respond to the question concerning Jesus, what must be known about Jesus is not developed. People must know they are sinners.

When Jesus told the women at the well, “Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life” (Jn. 4:14), she replied “Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw” (Jn. 4:14). Jesus responded by telling her, “Go, call your husband, and come here” (Jn. 4:15). Jesus knew that she was living with a man that was not her husband (Jn. 4:17-18). He was telling her that to have eternal life, she needed to know she was a sinner. Later in the conversation, when she said she knew the Messiah was coming (Jn. 4:25), Jesus told her, “I who speak to you am *He*” (Jn. 4:26). The women at the well told the people in the town, “Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?” (Jn. 4:29). She got it; she believed and so did they. They said, “We believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard *Him* and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world” (Jn. 4:42). From this conversation, it is obvious that to have eternal life people must know who they are (sinners) and who Jesus is (the Messiah) and they must trust Him for eternal life.

The Response

Fear “Felix was afraid and answered, “Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you” (24:25b). Felix was “afraid,” a translation of the Greek word which means “terrified.” Wiersbe says, “Roman leaders prided themselves in their ability to be stoical and restrain from their emotions under all circumstances, but a conviction from God gripped Felix’s heart, and he could not hide it.”

Procrastination Felix sent Paul away, saying he would hear him at a more convenient time. He did not say, “No.” He did not say, “Yes.” He did not attack Christianity. He believed what Paul said was true (“fear”). Procrastination is simply putting off something until later. We all do it sometimes. Some do it too much. I constantly put off reading and sometimes answering emails. Procrastination concerning spiritual things gets serious.

The Result

Death Felix had many opportunities to talk to Paul when it was more convenient. In fact, Paul spoke to Felix on other occasions, but as far as the record shows, Felix never responded positively to the gospel. If that is correct, and virtually all who study Felix conclude that that was the case, the result of his decision was eternal death. “Procrastination is, hands down, our favorite form of self-sabotage” (Alyce P. Cornyn-Selby). “Procrastination is one of the most common and deadliest of diseases and its toll on success and happiness is heavy” (Wayne Gretzky).

Deception One of the results of procrastination is deception. “Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was” (Jas. 1:22-24).

“My evil genius Procrastination has whispered me to tarry ‘til a more convenient season” (Mary Todd Lincoln). Someone has said, “Procrastination is the grave in which opportunity is buried.” Another has written, “I don’t mean to be grim or morbid, but today’s subject is deadly serious. Imagine being in a graveyard, examining a gravestone. Despite being covered with moss, you can read the inscription. It says, ‘Procrastination is the grave where your dreams, aspirations, and hopes lie.’ Is that where you want your dreams to end up? Buried? Aborted? Each time we put off doing what we wish to accomplish, each time we procrastinate, we bury our dreams. Or, as Victor Kiam said, ‘Procrastination is opportunity’s natural assassin’” (Chuck Gallazzi).

Summary: When it comes to spiritual decisions, procrastination can be deadly.

Some consequences of procrastination are minors, such as not paying your credit card bill on time. Others can be serious. I have heard of lawyers being disbarred due to procrastination and small business owners losing their businesses due to procrastination. People’s lives fall apart and are destroyed due to procrastination. Putting off spiritual decisions is in the latter category.

Seen written in a blog: “I’ve always procrastinated, for as long as I can remember. In fact, I don’t really understand how I managed to graduate from high school, let alone college, with the kind of study habits I had, which was so close to nil that I flat out don’t recall a single moment spent studying. I’d like to say I got my habit from my dad, but that would be horribly unfair to him. My dad is a disciplined, hard-working and intelligent man who just happens to drag his feet

every time my mom asks him to work on some household chore. But never mind where I got this habit. I just want to end it, that's all. It's playing heck with the rest of my life.

"Here is my daughter, 11, in the Gifted and Talented Education program and unwilling to challenge herself, all because she allows each of our worst enemies 'procrastination' to hold her back. Her step-father and I have spent all year working with her teacher, principal, and school counselor trying to get that monkey off her back. Finally, it was time to teach her one of the toughest lessons in life: what the repercussions are for a person's choices. With only one month left of school, I finally just retired my constant nagging and decided if she wants to fall on her face, then perhaps that is what she needs. I call it tough love and child physiologists probably call it the wrong tactic.

"Her report card finally came and, of course, I told her she would be spending all summer catching up and grounded, so she better enjoy her vacation with her brother and dad. I let her know all of her lying and manipulating everyone all year did not lie on her report card. I was upset and justifiably so, not because I felt I failed as a parent, but on the contrary ... she failed to achieve her fullest potential.

"At that moment, I did not tell her that. I decided to let her stew about mom being upset with her for a while. Since she obviously did pay attention and learn something so that she could pass the grade equivalency test, she does get to go onto the next grade level. I could not hold her back so she could participate in class this time, so I thought long and hard about a quote I could make up and turn into a poster for her room, stickers for the mirror in the bathroom, a sign on the fridge and anywhere else I could think of to put it. At last, I finally came up with one that included the word she and everyone else who knows her has been talking about 'procrastination.' 'Procrastination never won a race, received a promotion, or changed the outcome of any situation.'

"Then, I kept thinking about how true this is.... If a fireman procrastinated about going into a burning building to save a child, it could mean the difference between life and death. If a policeman drove 55 mph to the scene of an accident, it could mean the difference between life and death. If an employee decided to wait a few days to apply for a promotion, they would never be considered and I could go on and on.

"So, for this summer, my daughter will not be grounded because the damage is done, but she will be learning some life skills as well as what the consequences are for her every action when she chooses to allow procrastination to win. On top of that of course, she will be working on educational tutorials and I have one project that will be completed, to write an essay on procrastination. She will have to think up situations of when doing so would destroy our nation, mean the difference between life or death and the things that will hold us back in life. That will be her key and when she gets that, it will unlock the door to a future of commitment.... I can't do it for her; I can only give her the tools" (Copyright © 2002 Katrina A. Stull; motivateus.com accessed 10/25/09).

STANDING UP FOR YOUR RIGHTS

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have *your* cloak, also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two” (Mt. 5:38-41). Paul said something similar, “Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous and not before the saints?” (1 Cor. 6:1). He added, “Now, therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another. Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather *let yourselves* be cheated? No, you yourselves do wrong and cheat, and *you do* these things *to your* brethren!” (1 Cor. 6:7-8).

Turn the other cheek. If someone sues you, give them your cloak. Rather than sue another believer, suffer the loss. Wow! This sounds as if believers are to never stand up for their rights. Do believers have rights? Are they to be doormats and let other people walk all over them? To complicate matters, Paul stood up for his rights!

The Plot

The Request “Now when Festus had come to the province, after three days he went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem” (25:1). Festus was governor from June AD 57-August AD 59 (see Rackham; Marshall has slightly later dates). He no sooner became governor than he promptly paid a courtesy call to Jerusalem (Marshall).

“Then the high priest and the chief men of the Jews informed him against Paul; and they petitioned him, asking a favor against him, that he would summon him to Jerusalem; while *they* lay in ambush along the road to kill him” (25:2-3). Josephus said the High Priest was Ishmael (Alexander; Rackham). The High Priest and members of the Sanhedrin request that Paul’s trial be transferred to Jerusalem. Their real intent was to ambush Paul (21:27-31; 22:22; 23:10-15; 25:3).

The Refusal “But Festus answered that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and that he himself was going *there* shortly” (25:4). Moving the trial to Jerusalem would have been unnecessary and inconvenient (Alexander). So, Festus refused to do it. Festus displayed the qualities of a just judge; he appealed to the Roman justice tradition. He refused to condemn Paul without a proper trial and hearing his defense. There were no delays and no suggestions of bribery (Rackham).

The Decision “‘Therefore,’ he said, ‘let those who have authority among you go down with *me* and accuse this man, to see if there is any fault in him’” (25:5). Instead of moving the trial to Jerusalem, Festus decided that it would be held at Caesarea. Paul had been falsely accused. As Paul was doing something right, he was accused of doing something very wrong. Now, the religious leaders are plotting to kill him. Have you ever done something right and been accused of doing something wrong? Joseph was falsely accused. He was betrayed by his own brothers, accused of a crime he did not commit and falsely imprisoned. For simply praying, Daniel has deemed a criminal and thrown into a den of hungry lions.

Hughes writes, “In the early morning hours of October 4, 1980, a young nursing student was brutally murdered in the Chicago suburb of Oak Park. Following the advice of well-meaning

friends, Steve Linscott, a student at Emmaus Bible College, told police about a dream he'd had the night of the crime. Oak Park police later arrested him, interpreting his dream account as the roundabout confession of a psychopathic killer. Later, a jury found Linscott guilty, and he was sentenced to forty years in prison. There was just one problem—Linscott was innocent! Only after time in prison and numerous legal appeals—a process that lasted twelve years—was Linscott free and vindicated! Those years undoubtedly brought the most difficult challenges Linscott will ever face—separated from his wife and children for three and a half years except for brief visits, wondering if he had somehow brought all this on himself and why God had allowed it to happen, surviving prison violence” (Hughes, p. 317).

The Trail

The Accusations “And when he had remained among them more than ten days, he went down to Caesarea. And the next day, sitting on the judgment seat, he commanded Paul to be brought” (25:6). Felix promised he would *shortly* hold the trial for Paul at Caesarea (25:4). So after a brief visit in Jerusalem of more than ten days, Felix returned to Caesarea and the day after his arrival he summoned Paul for trial.

“When he had come, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood about and laid many serious complaints against Paul, which they could not prove” (25:7). The trial began with the Jews from Jerusalem explaining their accusations against Paul (24:5-6). Luke calls them serious and not provable. There were no witnesses to supply proof (Bruce; Marshall).

The Answer “While he answered for himself, ‘Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I offended in anything at all’” (25:8). When it was Paul’s turn to speak, he simply denied breaking the laws of the Jews, the Temple, or the Romans. He denied being an apostasy from the Law, sacrilegious, or treacherous revolt against the Emperor (Alexander). He is claiming that when living among the Jews, He is a law-abiding Jew (1 Cor. 9:20; Bruce).

The Assessment “But Festus, wanting to do the Jews a favor, answered Paul and said, ‘Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and there be judged before me concerning these things?’” (25:9). After hearing Paul’s defense, Festus asked if he was willing to be judged in Jerusalem with him as judge. His question was tantamount to his decision (Haenchen, cited by Marshall). Festus was trying to please the Jews (24:27).

Paul was up against it. Festus wanted to do the Jews a favor. The Jews want to kill Paul. If Paul said yes to Festus, Festus would be happy, the Jews would be elated, and Paul would be dead! What should he do?

The one thing he should not do is get bitter. Joseph did not get bitter. His attitude was, “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good” (Gen. 50:20). Daniel did not get bitter; He trusted the Lord. “Now the king was exceedingly glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no injury whatever was found on him because he believed in his God” (Dan. 6:23).

A false accusation is an opportunity for trust in God. Spurgeon said, “Often the less we say to our foes, and the more we say to our best Friend (capital “F”), the better it will fare with us” and “We ought never to fear those who are defending the wrong side, for since God is not with them their wisdom is folly, their strength is weakness, and their glory is their shame.” Hughes says, “When faced with groundless accusations, Paul did not go on a rampage but clearly and calmly stated the facts of his remembrance that God, the Judge of Heaven, will hold men accountable.”

Hughes continues the story. “Those were tough years, and yet years of growth and a growing awareness of the goodness of God. In Linscott’s words: ‘I have come to realize that we cannot judge God’s purposes, nor where He places us, nor why He chooses one path for our lives as opposed to another. The Bible itself is replete with accounts of divine action (or inaction) that does not seem fair or make sense except when viewed in light of God’s perfect plan. Thousands of Egyptian children were massacred while a baby named Moses was spared. Jacob was a liar and a thief, yet he, not his faithful brother Esau, received the blessing of their father, Isaac, and God. On one level, it makes no sense that God would allow His Son to die for the sins of humankind. But God has a plan—a perfect plan’” (Hughes, p. 318).

Paul had one out. As a Roman citizen, He had the right to appeal to Caesar, but could he, should he do that? That is standing up for your rights. Can believers do that?

The Appeal

The Answer “So Paul said, ‘I stand at Caesar’s judgment seat, where I ought to be judged. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you very well know’” (25:10). Paul answers that he has done nothing wrong in the judicial sense, the Jews have no ground of charge against him (Alexander) and that Festus knows that. Paul asserts that he is where he should be, before a Roman court, not a Jewish one. This is the third time Paul has claimed his rights as a Roman citizen (16:37-39; 22:25-29).

The Appeal “For if I am an offender, or have committed anything deserving of death, I do not object to dying; but if there is nothing in these things of which these men accuse me, no one can deliver me to them. I appeal to Caesar” (25:11). Paul explains (“for”) that if he is guilty of a crime punishable by death, he has no objection to dying. On the other hand, if his accusers could not substantiate their accusations, he appealed to Rome rather than to Jerusalem to be judged by the Sanhedrin. The power of appeal was one of the most valuable privileges of a Roman citizen (Rackham). There was no need to put his head in the lion’s mouth (Marshall).

Rackham writes, “The appeal to Caesar shows the vast strides Christianity has made. In thirty years, it takes us from the Galilean company in the upper chamber to the imperial palace at Rome. From the highest court at Jerusalem to its representative appeals to the highest tribunal in the empire—the judgment-seat of Caesar. The Caesar to whom S. Paul appealed—such is the irony of history—was Nero. On the death of his step-father, October 13, A.D. 54, Nero succeeded him, when he was only 17 years old. The years covered by these chapters fall into the first five years of the ‘golden quinquennium’ of Nero’s reign, when under the administration of the philosopher Seneca and Burrhus, the praetorian prefect, the empire enjoyed peace and prosperity. But Nero’s poisoning of his step-brother Britannicus within a year of his accession was an ominous sign of what was to come” (Rackham, p. 408).

Bruce says, ‘Whatever Nero’s personal character might be, the first five years of his principate (A.D. 54-59), when the imperial administration was carried on under the influence of his tutor Seneca, the Stoic philosopher, and Afranius Burrus, prefect of the praetorian guard, were looked back on as a miniature golden age. There was little in A.D. 59 that gave warning of the events of A.D. 64 and 65.’”

The Decision “Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, ‘You have appealed to Caesar? To Caesar you shall go!’” (25:12). After conferring with his advisors (Alexander), he announced that since Paul had appealed to Rome, Rome it is! According to

Roman law, until Paul was heard, he was treated uncondemned and protected from violent treatment by the severest of penalties (Rackham).

Summary: Knowing that he would be killed if his trial was moved to Jerusalem, Paul claimed his right as a Roman citizen and appealed to Rome.

You have rights. The Ten Commandments reflect our rights. For example, the command to not steal assumes you have the right to property.

You can stand up for those rights. Paul did. The incident in Acts 25 illustrates standing up for your legal rights. Paul had the right to appeal to Caesar and he exercised that right.

You can yield those rights. One of the great Christian virtues is “gentleness,” a great word that means “yielding your rights.” In Philippians 4, Paul says, “Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand” (Phil. 4:5). The Greek word translated “gentleness” means “to be fair, equitable, forbearance, reasonableness.” It denotes “sweet reasonableness” (Plummer on Phil.). “Graciousness” has been suggested as perhaps “the best English equivalent” (Martin on Phil.). It “forbears from insisting upon full rights where rigidity would be harsh.” It is “the spirit of willingness to yield under trial, which will show itself in a refusal to retaliate when attacked” (Martin on Phil.). This virtue also was a major characteristic of Christ (2 Cor. 10:1), a requirement for an elder (1 Tim. 3:3) and the responsibility of all believers (Titus 3:2).

In Matthew 5, Jesus explains what the Scribes and the Pharisees taught (“You have heard that it was said”). They interpreted the Law of Retaliation as justifying personal revenge. In response, Jesus is not laying down an absolute law to be applied in every case. No. When Jesus Himself was struck, He did not say, “Now hit the other cheek.” He asked, “Why did you strike me?” (Jn. 18:22-23). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus talks about real righteousness. He is saying don’t retaliate. The really righteous do not get offended when insulted. They accept insults without resentment or retaliation. So Jesus is saying that we give up our rights rather than retaliate. Paul echoed this concept in 1 Corinthians 6. He said believers should suffer wrong rather than go to court.

Let me illustrate giving up your rights. In the first century, it was possible to eat meat offered to idols, which, when done by believers, caused some to stumble. Paul teaches that you have the right to eat such meat and you have the right not to eat when that is the loving thing to do.

SEIZING EVERY OPPORTUNITY

Have you ever missed an opportunity to do something that later you wish you had done? For example, have you ever missed a chance to buy something when the price was down, but you didn't? Looking back, we all see the opportunities we have missed. Why do we do that? Acts 25 and 26 record the story of several men who seized some opportunities and missed others. It accounts for Paul's fifth defense (21:39-40; 22:30; 24:1; 25:6-7). He has appeared before the people, the Sanhedrin, Felix, and Festus. Now, he grabs the opportunity to speak before Agrippa.

Festus

The Request "And after some days King Agrippa and Bernice came to Caesarea to greet Festus" (25:13). After some time Paul was interviewed by Festus (25:1-12), King Agrippa and Bernice came to Caesarea to visit Festus. King Agrippa was the son of Agrippa I, who is always called Herod in Acts. Herod's death is recorded in Acts 12:23. For all practical purposes, Agrippa was a Jew; he had the right to appoint the high priest. Bernice was Agrippa's sister. After the death of her husband, she lived with her brother (Marshall).

"When they had been there many days, Festus laid Paul's case before the king, saying: 'There is a certain man left a prisoner by Felix about whom the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, when I was in Jerusalem, asking for a judgment against him'" (25:14-15). After Agrippa had been in Caesarea for many days, Festus told him about Paul and the request of the Jewish leader for a trial. This appears to have been a casual comment rather than an official report (Alexander). Felix left Paul in prison to please the Jews. He also expected a bribe. Festus, who was convinced of Paul's innocence, kept Paul in prison to please the Jews (Rackham).

The Response "To them I answered, 'It is not the custom of the Romans to deliver any man to destruction before the accused meets the accusers face to face, and has opportunity to answer for himself concerning the charge against him'" (25:16). Festus told Agrippa he informed the Jewish leaders that Roman law required a trial that allowed the accused to defend himself (24:4). Rackham says, "The Romans do not sell their verdicts for money or for popularity; nor do they condemn a man unheard. Justice was one of the virtues of the early Romans, and even in the latter days, compared with the corrupt administration of eastern countries, 'the Roman custom' must have seemed ideal." He adds that the actual practice fell far short of the theory (Rackham).

"Therefore, when they had come together, without any delay, the next day I sat on the judgment seat and commanded the man to be brought in" (25:17). Hence, as promised, without delay (25:4-6), a trial was held.

The Result "When the accusers stood up, they brought no accusation against him of such things as I supposed, but had some questions against him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who had died, whom Paul affirmed to be alive" (25:18-19). Festus explains that the charges brought against Paul were not the ones he expected. Instead, the charges brought against Paul by the Jews were questions about their religion and about Jesus dying and being alive. Festus focuses on the resurrection, describing it as someone unfamiliar with the doctrine. Festus is focused on Paul's very point during his defense (23:6; 24:15-16; 26:8-8). Marshall points out that the question of Paul's alleged desecration of the Temple has disappeared from sight; the

topic of the resurrection has replaced it. This statement by Festus proves that Paul was defending much more than the resurrection in general; he declared the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Wiersbe).

“And because I was uncertain of such questions, I asked whether he was willing to go to Jerusalem and there be judged concerning these matters” (25:20). Since Festus was uncertain about the religious questions, he asked if Paul would be willing to go to Jerusalem for a trial.

“But when Paul appealed to be reserved for the decision of Augustus, I commanded him to be kept till I could send him to Caesar” (25:21). When Paul appealed to Caesar (Barnes says the reigning emperor at this time was Nero), Festus kept him in prison until he could send him to Rome. The delay might have been because of the legal forms required in such cases or the need to wait for a military escort (Alexander). Festus had to wait for police and postal arrangements (Rackham).

Festus had a problem. While he had managed not to offend the Jews, he had not determined the charge against Paul. How could he send a prisoner to the emperor and not list the crimes against him (25:26)? Barclay explains, “Festus had got himself into a difficulty. It was Roman law that if a man appealed to Caesar and was sent to Rome, a written account of the case and of the charges against him must be sent with him. Festus’ problem was that there was no charge to send as far as he could see. That is why this meeting had been convened.”

Festus was being a sensible man. He did not know what to do. So he seized the opportunity to get advice from Agrippa. I do that kind of thing when I ask fellow pastors how they handle a problem I am facing.

Agrippa

The Request “Then Agrippa said to Festus, ‘I also would like to hear the man myself’ ‘Tomorrow,’ he said, ‘you shall hear him’” (25:22). Agrippa’s response to Festus was a request to hear Paul himself. Festus said he would set it up for the next day. He was undoubtedly delighted to have Agrippa’s help with this vexing case (Alexander). Since Agrippa had no authority to conduct a trial in Judea, this meeting was not a trial but an “unofficial inquiry.” Moreover, since Paul had appealed to Caesar, he could not be subjected to further trials until his appeal was heard in Rome. This meeting was held so Agrippa could obtain enough information about Paul’s case to help Festus frame his report (Bruce).

“So, the next day, when Agrippa and Bernice had come with great pomp, and had entered the auditorium with the commanders and the prominent men of the city, at Festus’ command Paul was brought in” (25:23). As scheduled, the next day, Agrippa and Bernice arrived with “needless and excessive ostentation” (Alexander). There is “quiet humor” in Luke’s account of the “great ceremony” (Bruce). The military commanders were there, each of whom was over a thousand men. Josephus says there were five commanders stationed at Caesarea. Prominent men of the city were also present when Paul was ushered into the auditorium. This was Paul’s most imposing and brilliant appearance (Alexander). Paul’s case had probably been discussed by these officials many times over the past two years. Hence, those present were unaware of what was happening (Wiersbe).

Barclay describes the scene, “There is no more dramatic scene in all the New Testament. It was with pomp that Agrippa and Bernice had come. They would have on their purple robes of royalty and the gold circlet of the crown on their brows. Doubtless, Festus had donned the scarlet robe a governor wore on state occasions. Close at hand, there must have stood Agrippa’s suite

and also in attendance were the most influential figures of the Jews. Close by Festus, there would stand the captains in command of the five cohorts stationed at Caesarea; in the background, there would be a solid phalanx of the tall Roman legionaries on ceremonial guard. Into such a scene came Paul, the little Jewish tent-maker, with his hands in chains, and yet from the moment he speaks, it is Paul who holds the stage.”

The Report “And Festus said: ‘King Agrippa and all the men who are here present with us, you see this man about whom the whole assembly of the Jews petitioned me, both at Jerusalem and here, crying out that he was not fit to live any longer’” (25:24). Festus spoke first, publicly explaining why they were there. The Sanhedrin had petitioned him at Jerusalem and at Caesarea to try Paul, insisting he was not fit to live.

“But when I found that he had committed nothing deserving of death, and that he himself had appealed to Augustus, I decided to send him” (25:25). Festus reports that he did not find that Paul had committed a capital crime, but Paul appealed to Augustus. So, Festus decided to send Paul to Rome. This is Luke’s second “official statement” (23:29) declaring Paul’s innocence (Wiersbe).

“I have nothing certain to write to my lord concerning him. Therefore, I have brought him out before you, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that after the examination has taken place I may have something to write” (25:26). The term “lord” refers to the emperor (Rackham). As Festus explains, he had nothing he could write to Rome! Hence, the present meeting. The purpose of this meeting is to determine what to say to Augustus. Festus had gotten himself into this mess because he wanted to please the Jews instead of acting on his own sense of justice and his conviction that Paul was innocent (Alexander).

“For it seems to me unreasonable to send a prisoner and not to specify the charges against him” (25:27). Alexander says, “Unreasonable might perhaps be still more exactly rendered irrational, absurd, something not only unbecoming or improper but a suitable subject of contempt and ridicule.” Marshall says Festus would be exposing himself to censure for incompetence. Why did he not set the prisoner free if there was no legitimate charge against Paul? Alexander explains, “The real difficulty of his present situation lay in the necessity of sending Paul to Rome because he had himself neglected to perform his duty, and was therefore utterly unable to report the case to Nero without self-crimination unless something should occur in this mock-trial or rehearsal of the one before the Emperor, to put a new face on the whole affair, of which he seems to have indulged some vague and groundless expectation.”

Agrippa was being a sensible man. He needed more information to make a decision. So he seized the opportunity to get information from Paul himself. Get facts first.

Paul

Introduction “Then Agrippa said to Paul, ‘You are permitted to speak for yourself’ So Paul stretched out his hand and answered for himself” (26:1). When Agrippa permitted Paul to speak, Paul gestured toward Agrippa (Alexander) and began to speak. This is Paul’s longest speech in Acts (Wiersbe).

“I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because today I shall answer for myself before you concerning all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, especially because you are expert in all customs and questions which have to do with the Jews. Therefore, I beg you to hear me patiently” (26:2-3). Paul says he is happy to speak in his own defense because Agrippa is an expert in the customs and questions of the Jews. Agrippa was a Jew (Alexander). Bruce

comments that unlike Tertullus before Felix (24:4), Paul did not promise to be brief, but he did ask for a patient hearing.

Before His Conversion “My manner of life from my youth, which was spent from the beginning among my own nation at Jerusalem, all the Jews know. They knew me from the first, if they were willing to testify, that according to the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee” (26:4-5). Paul begins with his youth, which the Jews knew was spent in Jerusalem, not in some obscure small town (Alexander). The Jews also knew that Paul was a Pharisee. By appealing to his early education and devotion to the observances of Judaism, Paul is vindicating his commitment to Judaism (Rackham).

“And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers. To this *promise* our twelve tribes, earnestly serving *God* night and day, hope to attain. For this hope’s sake, King Agrippa, I am accused by the Jews. Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead?” (26:6-8). Next, Paul says he is being accused of believing a promise God made to the forefathers of the Jews, a promise all Jews hope to attain. Paul uses the word “our” identifying himself with the Jews. Bruce explains that the Pharisees saw no fulfillment of Israel’s ancestral hope apart from the resurrection. He adds the Jews were prosecuting Paul for proclaiming this very hope. Alexander says that the hope of which Paul speaks is the hope of the Messiah and the resurrection is the resurrection of Christ.

Wiersbe says, “It is worth noting that Paul mentioned ‘our twelve tribes’ (v. 7). While it is true that the ten northern tribes (Israel) were conquered by Assyria in 722 B.C. and assimilated to some extent, it is not true that these ten tribes were a ‘loss’ or annihilated. Jesus spoke about all twelve tribes (Matt. 19:28), and so did James (James 1:1) and the apostle John (Rev. 7:4-8 and 21:12). God knows where His chosen people are, and He will fulfill the promise He has made to them.”

“Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth” (26:9). Paul explains that in his early years, he was convinced that he should do many things to oppose the name of Jesus. He felt it was his religious duty (Rackham).

“This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against *them*” (26:10). Paul had many put in prison and voted for some to be executed (Bruce). If this is to be taken literally, Paul was a member of the Sanhedrim. If so, he was married (A. T. Roberson) and a father (Vine) at the time and became a widower later (1 Cor. 7:7). As Wiersbe mentions, had Paul had been a member of the Sanhedrin, he would have mentioned it in one of his speeches. Most conclude that voting here is to be taken figuratively, meaning Paul participated in the persecution (Barnes). Marshall thinks this is “somewhat rhetorical.”

“And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled *them* to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted *them* even to foreign cities” (26:11). Paul was so engaged that he punished believers in every synagogue, pressured them to blaspheme and pursued them in foreign cities. The punishment was no doubt scourging and the blaspheme was forcing them to curse the name of Christ (Alexander), as well as execution (26:11).

His Conversion “While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, at midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me” (26:12-13). Paul explains that he had a commission from the chief priest to go to Damascus. According to Marshall, Paul’s authority was gained from the high priest (9:2), but here the reference is to “the leading priestly officials” (9:14, 21). Alexander said his authority was from the Sanhedrin. On

his way to Damascus, not merely for personal reasons, but under national authority, he saw the light from heaven at noon. Barclay says, “Unless a traveler was in a really desperate hurry, he rested during the midday heat. So we see how Paul was driving himself on this mission of persecution.” The comparison of the light with the sun’s brilliance would suggest the light’s divine character (Rackham).

“And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? *It is hard for you to kick against the goads*’” (26:14). When the light appeared, they all fell to the ground. The account recorded in Acts 9, says Paul fell (9:4) and later it says, “The men who journeyed with him *stood* speechless” (9:7, italics added). Here it says “all” fell. The two accounts are not contradictory. When the light first appeared, they all fell. Acts 9 simply focuses on Paul. Then, they all stood up.

At any rate, Paul heard the Lord speaking in Hebrew. Marshall says “Hebrew language” is generally taken to mean to the Aramaic language (21:40). Asking Paul why he was persecuting Him, the Lord told him it was hard to kick against the goads. Kicking against the goads was a common proverb in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin literature (Rackham on Acts 9:5; see Marshall). The point is that it is painful, not difficult, to kick against a sharp point. Bruce says this proverb from agricultural life has been thought to suggest that Paul was suffering from an uneasy conscience (see Wiersbe), but Paul maintained he had a clear conscience all of his life (23:1; 24:16). Saul had been resisting evidence and authority (Rackham). Marshall points out that in Greek literature, the proverb refers to struggling against one’s destiny, which he says seems the more likely interpretation here.

Barclay says, “When a young ox was first yoked it tried to kick its way out. If it was yoked to a one-handed plough, the ploughman held in his hand a long staff with a sharpened end which he held close to the ox’s heels so that every time it kicked, it was jagged with the spike. If it was yoked to a wagon, the front of the wagon had a bar studded with wooden spikes, which jagged the ox if it kicked. The young ox had to learn submission the hard way and so had Paul.”

“So, I said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And He said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting’” (26:15). Paul responded by asking who was speaking, which indicates that the term “Lord” was an expression of polite respect. Jesus identified Himself, telling Paul that he was persecuting Him.

“But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you” (26:16). The other two accounts of Paul’s conversion (9:1-9; 22:6-11), say Paul was told to rise and stand on his feet, but they indicate that command was followed by a word to go into the city to receive further instructions, which here are given on the spot. What Ananias told Paul was originally uttered by the Lord, and the distinction between what came directly and indirectly from the Lord is considered unessential to Paul’s purpose here (Alexander). Paul was told to be a minister and witness what he had seen and what would be revealed to him later. The word rendered “minister” means “under-rower” and refers to a lowly servant on a galley ship (Wiersbe).

“I will deliver you from the *Jewish* people, as well as *from* the Gentiles, to whom I now send you to open their eyes, *in order* to turn *them* from darkness to light, and *from* the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me” (26:17-18). The Lord goes on to explain that Paul would be delivered from the Jews and Gentiles. His personal safety is assured (Alexander). Paul’s purpose is to convert the Gentiles, which is described in detail. Opening eyes removes spiritual blindness,

enabling people to see spiritual truth (Alexander). Barclay says, “When Christ comes into a man’s life, he enables him to see things he never saw before. The eyes that were bound for earth suddenly saw the glory of heaven. The eyes which were fixed on self suddenly look with love on others.” To turn from darkness to light is to turn from spiritual ignorance and sin to spiritual knowledge and holiness (Alexander). “Because he had his back to the light, he walked in the shadows, but now he is walking towards the light and his way is clear before him” (Barclay). To turn from the power of Satan to God is to turn from being under the dominion of Satan to not only being in the dominion of God, but to God Himself, “implying a more intimate union and communion” (Alexander). The purpose of this conversion is the forgiveness of sins, that is, going from guilt to forgiveness and from not having an inheritance to having one. All this is theirs when they are separated unto the Lord by trusting Him for the forgiveness of sins. Marshall thinks that Paul’s theological language was probably too deep for Agrippa to comprehend. Unbelievers are blind; only Christ can open their eyes and give them light and freedom (2 Cor. 4:3-6).

After His Conversion “Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision” (26:19). Paul concludes that he was not disobedient to the divine commission.

“but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance” (26:20). In obedience to the divine communication, Paul preached in Damascus and Jerusalem and through all Judea. This is not a reference to the beginning of his ministry (Gal. 1:22), but to his whole ministry among the Jews before proceeding to the Gentiles (Alexander). Paul’s message was to repent, which is an inner change of mind (Rackham on 26:18), to turn to God in faith (26:18), and to do works suited to the inward change of mind that is repentance. “The stress on producing practical evidence of repentance is parallel to the preaching of John the Baptist” (Marshall). This statement by Paul proves that repentance is an internal affair, not external fruit, because Paul says after repenting and turning to God, there is external fruit.

“For these reasons the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me” (26:21). The reason that the Jews arrested him and tried to kill him was because of what he preached (Alexander). He preached a law-free gospel that obliterated the religious barrier between the Jews and the Gentiles (Bruce).

“Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles” (26:22-23). Paul declares that by God’s grace, he has proclaimed from that day to this to people of all classes the things that the prophets and Moses said would come, namely, that the Messiah would suffer, be raised from the dead, and proclaim light to Gentiles as well as Jews. Paul’s message was not anti-Jewish but in strict accordance with the Jewish Scripture.

Barclay observes, “In this passage, Paul insists that the center of his whole message is the resurrection. His witness is not of someone who has lived and died but of One who is gloriously present and alive forevermore. For Paul, every day is Easter Day.” Why should those who believe in the resurrection of the dead find it difficult to believe that God raised Jesus from the dead? (Bruce).

Technically, having appealed to Rome, Paul did not have to defend himself (Rackham), but he seized the opportunity to proclaim the gospel by giving his testimony. He was committed.

Response

From Festus “Now as he thus made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, ‘Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!’” (26:24). Paul has been speaking to Agrippa (26:2, 7, 13, 19), who knew the Jewish Scriptures, but Festus, a Roman, was hearing all of this with Roman ears. What Paul was saying appeared irrational to him. So without contempt, but simply as the Roman, ignorant of the Jewish religion, Festus exclaims that Paul is out of his mind. His much learning has driven him crazy, an obvious allusion to the Jewish Scriptures. Rackham puts it like this: “Through excessive study of Jewish lore, the apostle had become possessed of a religious *frenzy*.” Wiersbe comments, “How strange that Festus did not think Paul was mad when he was persecuting the church! (v. 11). Nobody called D. L. Moody crazy when he was energetically selling shoes and making money, but when he started winning souls, people gave him the nickname ‘Crazy Moody.’ This is not the first time Paul had been called ‘crazy’ (2 Cor. 5:13), and he was only following in the footsteps of his Master (Mark 3:20-21; John 10:20).”

“But he said, ‘I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason’ (26:25). Paul calmly responds that he is not nuts; he is speaking the truth and what he is saying is sensible. The Greek word translated “reason” means “sensible, soundness of mind, good sense, sanity.” Paul is claiming that he is speaking the truth with sobriety, not wild speculation (Marshall).

“For the king, before whom I also speak freely, knows these things; for I am convinced that none of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner” (26:26). Paul explains (“for”) what he is talking about was done openly in public and not privately behind closed doors. To say “this thing was not done in a corner” is putting it mildly. Jesus had been a public figure for at least three years, with huge crowds following Him. The Jewish Sanhedrin, as well as the Roman governor Pilate, were all involved. Agrippa knew Paul was speaking the truth. Paul is saying to Festus that what might seem to be madness to him might be intelligible to another who, by early education and experience, understands (Alexander).

From Agrippa “King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe” (26:27). Turning from Festus to Agrippa, Paul asked if he believed the prophets and answered his own question. Paul is sure Agrippa believed in the inspiration of the prophets.

“Then Agrippa said to Paul, ‘You almost persuade me to become a Christian’” (26:28). Agrippa’s answer that Paul almost persuaded him to become a Christian has been interpreted as a “trivial jest, a bitter sarcasm, a grave irony, a burst of anger, and an expression of sincere conviction” (Alexander). Rackham takes it to mean “with a little more persuasion and you make me too a Christian” (Rackham). Marshall thinks that is lighthearted, but not ironic, Agrippa’s attempt to get out of the logical trap in which he was in danger of being caught. Apparently, Paul took it to be a straight answer (26:29).

“And Paul said, “I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains” (26:29). Paul responds to Agrippa’s answer with a prayer wish that he was like, or at least almost like himself, expect, of course, for his chains.

From the Group “When he had said these things, the king stood up, as well as the governor and Bernice and those who sat with them; and when they had gone aside, they talked among themselves, saying, ‘This man is doing nothing deserving of death or chains’” (26:30-31). Agrippa, Festus, Bernice, and others decide in a sidebar that Paul was not guilty of any crime

deserving prison or death. Paul's innocence once again been "triumphantly established" by the best-informed arbiter before whom he had appeared (Alexander).

"Then Agrippa said to Festus, 'This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar'" (26:32). Then, Agrippa tells Festus if Paul had not appealed to Caesar, the charges against him would be discharged and he would be freed. Alexander explains, "Paul was not the only case on which Agrippa was to sit in judgment. The very man, who had requested his assistance as an arbiter in Paul's case, had by that act made him judge of his own conduct. We have seen already (on 25:9 above), that Festus, by neglecting to discharge Paul when his innocence was proved, had forced him to appeal, and at the same time placed himself in the embarrassing position of a magistrate sending home a prisoner, who might have been disposed of on the spot, but for his own neglect of duty. During this last hearing by Agrippa, Festus seems to have indulged a hope that something would occur to relieve him from his false position; but of this hope, he was now deprived by the expression of Agrippa's judgment here recorded."

Claudias Lysias, Festus, and Agrippa have now declared Paul's innocence. This present agreement is another contribution to Luke's apologetic motive (Bruce). "Luke continues to accumulate these official statements so that his readers will understand that Paul was an innocent man (see 16:35-40; 18:12-17; 23:29; 25:25)" (Wiersbe).

Summary: Otherwise, sensible people miss spiritual opportunities, but committed people seize every spiritual opportunity.

Barclay says, "One of the extraordinary things about the great characters in the New Testament story is that they were never afraid to confess what once they had been. Here, in the presence of the king, Paul frankly confesses that there was a day when he had tried to blast the Christians out of existence. There was a famous evangelist called Brownlow North. In his early days, he lived a life of anything but Christian. Once, just before he was to enter the pulpit in a church in Aberdeen, he received a letter. This letter informed him that its writer had evidence of some disgraceful thing that Brownlow North had done before he became a Christian, and it went on to say that the writer proposed to interrupt the service and to tell the whole congregation of that sin if he preached. Brownlow North took the letter into the pulpit; he read it to the congregation; he told of the things that he had done, and then he told them that Christ had changed him and that Christ could do the same for them. He used the very evidence of his shame to turn it to the glory of Christ."

A secular song named "Lose Yourself," which won both the Grammy and Academy awards, asks, "Look, if you had one shot, or one opportunity to seize everything you ever wanted—one moment, would you capture it or just let it slip?" ("Lose Yourself," by Eminem).

RESPONDING TO A CRISIS

Have you ever been involved in a crisis? Have you ever been in a life-threatening crisis affecting your life and the lives of others? The chances are probably excellent that in the future, you will face a life-threatening situation, such as an automobile accident, seeing someone have a heart attack, etc. In Acts 27, Paul faced a crisis. It is been called “one of the best-told, most-detailed shipwrecks in ancient history” (Hughes). How did Paul respond? What can we learn from his response?

If Possible, Prevent a Crisis

From Caesarea To Sidon “And when it was decided that we should sail to Italy, they delivered Paul and some other prisoners to *one* named Julius, a centurion of the Augustan Regiment” (27:1). When Felix and Agrippa decided on a precise time and mode of travel (Alexander), Paul, as well as some other prisoners, were put into the custody of a centurion named Julius. It is possible that Julius was a *frumentarius*, an officer charged with supervising the transportation of grain (*frumentum*) to Rome (Ramsay; Bruce). The Greek word translated “other” implies another of a different kind (Rackham).

For the first time since Acts 21:18, Luke includes himself (“we”). Paul’s arrest had separated them, except for the time when Felix gave Paul’s friends access to him (24:23). Perhaps it was during this time that Luke gathered information about the early days of the Christian movement (Bruce) in preparation for composing his Gospel and the early part of Acts.

“So, entering a ship of Adramyttium, we put to sea, meaning to sail along the coasts of Asia. Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, was with us” (27:2). The ship on which they traveled came from Adramyttium, a seaport of Mysia (Bruce), not far from Troas (Marshall). Entering the ship at Caesarea (Alexander), they set sail along the coast of Asia Minor to Sidon (27:3), a distance of about 70 miles (Rackham; Wiersbe says it was 80 miles). It was late in sailing season, either at the end of August or the beginning of September (Rackham). Aristarchus was a fellow laborer with Paul (Philem. 24) and a fellow prisoner (Col. 4:10). Rackham contends there is no reason why the statement concerning Aristarchus being a fellow prisoner should not be taken literally. He was a Jew, and perhaps he was with Paul during the riot in Jerusalem. On the other hand, Luke is not called a prisoner, indicating that he accompanied Paul as an attendant.

“And the next *day* we landed at Sidon. And Julius treated Paul kindly and gave *him* liberty to go to his friends and receive care” (27:3). When the ship docked at Sidon, a Phoenician port 69 miles north of Caesarea (Bruce; Marshall says it was 69 nautical miles), Julius graciously permitted Paul to visit his friends. In John 15, the term “friends” is a Christian designation. There was probably a Christian community at Sidon as a result of the dispersion following the death of Stephen (11:19). Alexander says that the Greek word translated “receive care” may either mean hospitality in general or, more specifically, nursing care required because of ill-health. Marshall points out that loading and unloading cargo from a ship can take a remarkable amount of time. Normally, passengers would go ashore, while prisoners would be kept on board for security.

Thus, the centurion shows consideration for Paul by letting him go to shore, presumably with the soldier.

From Sidon to Myra “When we had put to sea from there, we sailed under *the shelter of Cyprus*, because the winds were contrary and when we had sailed over the sea which is off Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, *a city of Lycia*” (27:4-5). When the ship departed from Sidon, it sailed past Cyprus on its way to Myra. Because the winds were contrary, the ship passed by on the lee side [the side away from the wind] (Bruce), that is, between the island and the wind (Alexander). Passing Cilicia and Pamphylia, they landed at Myra. Earlier, when Paul was coming to Caesarea, Paul crossed the open sea (21:3), but because of the current conditions, they had to work their way along the coast of Asia Minor with the aid of currents and land breezes (Rackham).

From Myra to New Havens “There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing to Italy, and he put us on board” (27:6). At Myra, they boarded a large Alexandrian ship. Barclay says they could be 140 feet long and 36 feet wide with a 33 draught. This was a huge ship built to carry grain and able to accommodate many people (27:36). Rackham explains, “By this time, the vast city of Rome had become almost entirely dependent upon foreign cornfields for its bread. Egypt was the chief source of supply; every year, an enormous quantity of grains shipped from Alexandria.” Hughes points out that this kind of ship was sturdy, but it had distinct disadvantages in high seas because it had no rudder. It was steered by two large paddles extending from the stern and only one mast on which was a great square sail. It could not sail into the wind.

“When we had sailed slowly many days, and arrived with difficulty off Cnidus, the wind not permitting us to proceed, we sailed under *the shelter of Crete off Salmone*” (27:7). Because of contrary wind, they slowly made their way with difficulty. The distance between Myra and Cnidus is about 130 miles (Wiersbe). The trip would normally take one day with a fair wind, but with a contrary wind, it took many days. The wind also drove the ship to the east and south of Crete (Alexander).

“Passing it with difficulty, we came to a place called Fair Havens, near the city of Lasea” (27:8). Passing Crete with difficulty, they docked at Fair Havens and waited for the wind to change. Luke mentions Lasea because if they did not proceed beyond Fair Heaven, they could find adequate winter quarters in that city (Bruce).

“Now when much time had been spent, and sailing was now dangerous because the Fast was already over, Paul advised them, saying, ‘Men, I perceive that this voyage will end with disaster and much loss, not only of the cargo and ship, but also our lives’” (27:9-10). Since the conditions for sailing were so difficult, they spent a lot of time at Fair Havens. They stayed there until after the Fast, the Day of Atonement.

To say they were there until after the Day of Atonement is significant. Sea travel was dangerous after that time of the year (Rackham). To be more precise, the danger season began about September 14 and lasted until November 11; after that, sea trouble came to an end, and winter was over (Bruce). In the words of Barclay, “sailing was considered doubtful after September and impossible by November” (Barclay). So, to say that it was after the Day of Atonement, which in AD 59 fell on October 5, indicates they were well into the dangerous season (Bruce).

Paul advised them not to sail because, in his opinion (“I perceive;” Bruce), if they did, the trip would end in disaster with loss of cargo, the ship itself, and even their lives. Paul spoke as “an experienced traveler of sound judgment” (Bruce on 27:22-24). Furthermore, the new first

and the destructive power of the storm at sea. Earlier, he had written to the Corinthians, “Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep” (2 Cor. 11:25). Wiersbe says that the Greek word translated “perceive” means “to perceive from past experience.” He adds, “When Julius added up the votes, it was three to one that the ship set sail. After all, the majority cannot be wrong, especially when it includes the experts!”

“Nevertheless, the centurion was more persuaded by the helmsman and the owner of the ship than by the things spoken by Paul” (27:11). The individuals involved in the decision were the centurion, the helmsman and the owner of the ship. In ancient times, the shipowner accompanied his vessel (Alexander), normally acting as captain of the ship (Bruce). In this case, because he was the senior officer on the board, the centurion was the one who made the final decision (Barclay). He is represented as the authoritative person aboard the ship (Marshall). Having listened to Paul, the expertise of the helmsman and the owner, the helmsman and the owner more persuaded the centurion; he took the advice of experts instead of the prisoner. Wiersbe calls this “a classic illustration of how *not* to determine the will of God” (Wiersbe, italics his).

“And because the harbor was not suitable to winter in, the majority advised to set sail from there also, if by any means they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete opening toward the southwest and northwest, *and winter there*” (27:12). The majority, including the helmsman and the owner, argued that they should continue the trip because the harbor at Fair Havens was not suitable for protecting a ship during the winter. On the other hand, if they could reach Phoenix, they would have a harbor that would protect the ship during the winter. The hope of reaching Italy before spring was abandoned; the only question was where they might safely spend the winter (Alexander).

From New Havens to Hopelessness “When the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained *their* desire, putting out to sea, they sailed close by Crete” (27:13). When a soft south wind began to blow, they felt it was safe to sail to Crete. It seemed to justify their decision (Rackham). Setting sail from New Havens, they followed the coastline, “hugging the shore” (Bruce).

“But not long after, a tempestuous head wind arose, called Euroclydon” (27:14). Not long after their departure, the soft wind turned to a stormy wind. The Greek word translated “tempestuous” gives us the English word “typhoon” (Wiersbe). This type of wind was so common it had a name. “Euroclydon” is a compound word made up of the Greek word for east wind and a Latin word from north wind. It may have been the soldier’s term for the northeast wind (Marshall). Rackham calls it a hurricane. Modern navigators speak of sudden changes from gentle south to a tempestuous north wind as not only frequent but almost invariable in that part of the Mediterranean (Alexander).

“So, when the ship was caught, and could not head into the wind, we let *her* drive and running under *the shelter of* an island called Clauda, we secured the skiff with difficulty” (27:15-16). Unable to steer the ship, the crew let it drift, and the wind drove it 23 miles south to the island of Clauda (Wiersbe). Unable to make any headway into the strong headwind, they took shelter by sailing to the south (“under”) of the island Clauda. Being caught in a storm, they did everything humanly possible to ride it out. First, they were able to secure the skiff (Bruce: “dinghy”) only with “great difficulty,” Luke probably remembering his blisters (Bruce). This small boat was normally towed behind the ship, but during a storm, it was in danger of being swamped or dashed against the ship itself (Marshall).

“When they had taken it on board, they used cables to undergird the ship; and fearing lest they should run aground on the Syrtis *sands*, they struck sail and so were driven” (27:17).

Second after they were able to get the skiff aboard the boat, they wrapped cables around the hull (Rackham). In ancient times, this was such a common practice that the apparatus for doing it was part of the ships provision (Alexander). When used, it literally held the ship together like a tied-up parcel (Barclay). They feared being blown into Syrtis, an area of quicksand and shoals off the coast of Libya, legendary for being a danger to ships, like the Bermuda Triangle today (Marshall). It was the graveyard of many a ship (Barclay).

“And because we were exceedingly tempest-tossed, the next *day* they lightened the ship. On the third *day* we threw the ship’s tackle overboard with our own hands” (27:18-19). In the meantime, conditions worsened, so they were “exceedingly tempest-tossed.” The next day, they took the third step, lightening the load of the ship by throwing overboard the least valuable things on the ship (Alexander; 27: 38). On the third day of the storm, they tossed the ship’s tackle, that is, “all the ships furniture that was not absolutely necessary” (Rackham), overboard. Luke, as well as other passengers, participated in this operation (“our own hands”).

“Now when neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest beat on us, all hope that we would be saved was finally given up” (27:20). To complicate matters, the overcast shut out the sun by day and the stars by night, hindering them from using the sun and the stars for navigational purposes. Ancient ships did not have the sextant or a compass; thus, in cloudy and dark weather, they had no means of finding their way (Barclay). The inability to determine where they were combined with the torturing tempest, implying that the ship was leaking (Alexander) drove them to abandon all hope that they would be saved.

They did everything they could do to save the ship. They put the skiff aboard the ship. They wrapped cables around the hull. They jettisoned some of the cargo. The fact that they even tossed the grain, the ship owner’s livelihood, overboard demonstrates just how desperate they were. “Humanly speaking, there appeared to be no chance of survival, and despondency settled on the ship” (Marshall).

This crisis could have been prevented had they listened to Paul’s common sense. Perhaps we could avoid a life-threatening crisis by not driving too fast or in a storm.

Trust the Lord

Remain Calm “But after long abstinence from food, then Paul stood in the midst of them and said, ‘Men, you should have listened to me, and not have sailed from Crete and incurred this disaster and loss’” (27:21). The situation seemed hopeless (27:20), but Paul did not panic. He remained calm and clear-headed.

Trust the Lord Paul trusted the Lord (27:23-25). Hughes remarks, “Huge waves were assaulting the ship, but Paul’s soul was as calm as a windless pond.” He goes on to say that Paul was calm because he was anchored. Later, he adds, “The reason Paul displayed such courage was *he believed God!*” (Hughes, italics his). Believers should be anchored to the Rock! Paul’s anchor was rooted in his relationship to the Lord (“to whom I belong and whom I serve,” 27:23). Hughes says believers belong to the Lord as sheep belong to a shepherd like a child belongs to a father, and a bride belongs to a bridegroom.

Allen Redpath, who once was pastor of Moody Church, tells of his wife saying to their two young girls, “Go get your father for breakfast. One daughter was much older than the other. So she was able to bound up the stairs ahead of her sister. When her younger sibling arrived on the scene, the older sister announced, “I’ve already told daddy breakfast is ready and besides, I have all of daddy.” When daddy saw the tears begin to trickle down his youngest daughter’s face, he

picked her up and sat her on his knee. She put her head on his shoulder, smiled at her sister and said, “You might have all of daddy, but daddy has all of me.”

Minister to Others

Share Spiritual Truth After several days of abstaining from food, Paul spoke (27:21). They did not eat for days, not because of a religious fast or the scarcity of food (27:38), but because they lost their appetite! No doubt, many became seasick. John Newton, the famous hymn writer, described his experience on the sea. “We found that the water having been floated all our of our movables into the hole, all the casks of our provisions had been beaten into pieces of the violent motion of the ship. On the other hand, our livestock, such as pigs, sheep, and poultry, had been washed overboard in the storm; in effect, all of the provisions we saved ... would have been subsisted us for but a week, but at scanty allowance” (Newton, cited by Bruce).

He could not resist telling them they should have listened to him and not sail from Crete. Had they listened to him, they would not have suffered the disaster they were in or the loss of things they had thrown overboard (27:10). Paul did not say this to put them down or to exalt himself; he was saying you should have listened to me in the past which proves that you should listen to me in the present.

“And now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship” (27:22). Paul’s purpose was not to reprimand but to encourage. So he tells them to take heart, assuring them that while they will lose the ship, there will be no loss of life.

Paul did several things to encourage them. First, he shared spiritual truth with them. “For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, saying, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you’” (27:23-24). Paul explains (“for”) that the reason they should be encouraged is that an angel had assured him that he would speak before Caesar and all that were with him would be spared. Paul identifies the angel as the angel of the God to whom he belonged and to whom he served, a natural expression in addressing Gentiles who knew nothing of Paul’s religion, but to whom the word “angel” was familiar, meaning a messenger from heaven (Alexander). This message was a confirmation of the earlier revelation recorded in Acts 23:11 that Paul would reach Rome. It was God’s will that he witnessed to Caesar. “The wording implies that Paul had prayed for his fellow travelers and that God heard his prayer” (Marshall).

“Therefore, take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me” (27:25). Paul concludes (“therefore”) that they should be encouraged because he believes that what God told him is what will happen. Namely, they will be spared.

Share Reality Second, Paul spoke about reality; he warned them about future trouble. He said, “However, we must run aground on a certain island” (27:26). God would deliver them, but there was trouble ahead. Paul was a man of faith (27:25) but also a realist (27:26).

Luke records the fulfillment of Paul’s prediction. “Now when the fourteenth night had come, as we were driven up and down in the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors sensed that they were drawing near some land” (27:27). About midnight on the 14th night of their ordeal, the sailors sensed that they were near land, probably because of the sight or sound of breakers on the rocky coast (Alexander; Rackham). Rackham says that it has been calculated the ship drifted 480 miles (Marshall says 475 nautical miles).

“And they took soundings and found *it* to be twenty fathoms; and when they had gone a little farther, they took soundings again and found *it* to be fifteen fathoms” (27:28). To test their

hunch, the sailors took soundings. Sure enough, the first was at 20 fathoms (Wiersbe: 120 feet) and the second at 15 (Wiersbe: 90 feet), indicating they were getting closer and closer to land.

“Then, fearing lest we should run aground on the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern, and prayed for day to come” (27:29). Realizing they were getting closer to land, fearing they were going to run aground on rocks, they dropped four anchors, not from the usual place, the bow, but from the stern. This was done to prevent the ship from swinging around toward the wind and to keep it facing the land (Rackham). They also prayed for daylight, meaning, of course, that they would make it till dawn.

“And as the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship, when they had let down the skiff into the sea, under pretense of putting out anchors from the prow” (27:30). The sailors were not satisfied that they would make it to safety. So they sought to escape from the ship, letting down the skiff under the pretense of extending the anchors from the ship’s bow to keep the ship steadier (Rackham). Unlike Paul, these sailors did not believe what God had revealed to Paul. Rather than thinking only of themselves, they were willing to abandon both the ship and their companions. They were willing to secure their own safety at the expense of the others on board (Bruce).

In *Robinson Crusoe*, when the ship ran aground, the crew took to the boats and all perished except Crusoe, who later was able to come back to the ship and comment, “I saw evidently, but if we had kept on board, we had been all safe,—that is to say, we have all got saved onshore.” Marshall comments, “Defoe’s story indicates that man will do foolish things.”

“Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, ‘Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved’” (27:31). Observing what was taking place, Paul intervened, telling the centurion that unless the soldiers stayed on the ship, they could not be saved. The sailors were needed even if the ship ran aground (Rackham). The ship without skilled hands would have been disastrous (Bruce). Passengers and crew would sink or swim together (Barclay).

“Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the skiff and let it fall off” (27:32). Acting under the centurion’s orders and probably prompted by their own sense of danger, the soldiers cut the ropes of the skiff and let it fall into the sea. In doing so, the soldiers showed their faith in Paul (Rackham). “By this time, the centurion had learned that it was unwise to disregard Paul’s advice” (Bruce). Paul had warned them that trouble was ahead. Sure enough, they faced trouble from the sea and the sailors. Our trials usually involve people.

Shared Practical Advice Thirdly, Paul gave them practical advice. “And as day was about to dawn, Paul implored *them* all to take food, saying, ‘Today is the fourteenth day you have waited and continued without food, and eaten nothing. Therefore, I urge you to take nourishment, for this is for your survival, since not a hair will fall from the head of any of you’” (27:33-34). Just before dawn, Paul urged them to eat because they had not eaten in fourteen days. As Paul explains, they’re going to survive and, in the meantime, they need the nourishment. This is the fourth time Paul the prisoner has assumed, as it were, the command of the ship or, at least, given direction in the crisis (Alexander).

“And when he had said these things, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all; and when he had broken *it* he began to eat” (27:35). When Paul concluded speaking, he took bread, gave thanks in the presence of them all, distributed the bread and began to eat. Although the language of the Lord’s Table is used to describe what Paul did, this is not the observance of the Lord’s Table. Paul urged them to eat, using his example (Alexander). It was not a celebration of the Lord’s Table, but Luke wished to remind his readers of it (Rackham). To the majority, it was an ordinary meal, and to believers, it was a celebration of thanksgiving.

“Then they were all encouraged, and also took food themselves. And in all we were two hundred and seventy-six persons on the ship” (27:36-37). It worked! All 267 people aboard were *encouraged* and eat. The number of people aboard the ship is not an exaggeration. It was not unusual to have that many people aboard a boat. In fact, in AD 64, Josephus records that he was aboard a ship carrying 600 (Rackham). Barclay says, “Paul was a man of visions and a man of God, but Paul was also an intensely practical man. He did not doubt that God would do His part, but he also knew that men must do theirs.” Barclay adds, “Hungry men are not efficient men.”

“So, when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship and threw out the wheat into the sea” (27:38). With renewed physical strength they had received from eating, they set about to do the practical things needed in that situation. They lightened the ship by throwing the cargo and wheat destined for Rome overboard.

“When it was day, they did not recognize the land; but they observed a bay with a beach, onto which they planned to run the ship if possible” (27:39). As the day dawned, they did not recognize the land, but they could see that they were in a bay and planned, if possible, to run the ship onto a beach. The traditional site where they landed is St. Paul’s Bay on the northeast coast of Malta (Marshall).

“And they let go the anchors and left *them* in the sea, meanwhile loosing the rudder ropes; and they hoisted the mainsail to the wind and made for shore” (27:40). In preparation for beaching the ship, they let the anchors sink into the sea, loosened the rudder ropes, and hoisted the sail.

“But striking a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the prow stuck fast and remained immovable, but the violence of the waves was breaking up the stern” (27:41). On their way to the shore, on a place where the two seas met, they ran aground, the bow embedded in the sand at the bottom of the sea. The two seas have been taken to mean the channel between the side of the bay and the little island of Salmonetta, which would have caused some turbulence as well as having a bottom of clay in which a ship could get stuck (Marshall). They could not move, as the violent waves crashed upon the ship, the stern began breaking into pieces.

“And the soldiers’ plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim away and escape. But the centurion, wanting to save Paul, kept them from *their* purpose, and commanded that those who could swim should jump *overboard* first and get to land, and the rest, some on board and some on *parts* of the ship. And so, it was that they all escaped safely to land” (27:42-44). At this point, the soldiers decided to kill the prisoners lest they should escape. According to Roman law, if a prisoner escaped, his guard must undergo the sentence and penalty the escaped prisoner would have suffered. “Human selfishness made another attempt to frustrate the divine purpose” (Rackham). Wanting to save Paul, out of gratitude, if not affection (Rackham), the centurion stopped them, commanding them to swim to shore first. Those who could swim swam to shore. Others floated ashore on boards or parts of the ship. All arrived safely on shore. “Human society has no idea how much it owes, in the mercy of God, to the presence in it of righteous men and women” (Bruce; see Gen. 18:26-32).

Summary: The way to respond to a crisis is to trust the Lord and minister to others.

Marshall remarks, “The length of the narrative in proportion to that of the book as a whole is remarkable, especially since at first sight the narrative appears to contribute little to the theological aim of Acts.” He goes on to say that the story demonstrates the divine protection of Paul and Paul, encouraging others in times of disaster and even contributing to saving lives.

Marshall adds that the story demonstrates God can allow a man to descend into the deepest need before delivering them.

Storms are a fact of life. Life includes life-threatening situations.

Storms reveal character. It has been said that Paul was a “practical man in a critical emergency—keeping his head when all about him are losing theirs.” Paul knew how to balance the prudent concern for safety with a willingness to take a risk in the interest of truth. He was neither a reckless martyr nor ruled by an overwhelming need for self-preservation (Hodges). Some of the sailors selfishly tried to escape.

Storms are an opportunity to serve others as well as a witness to others. “At the moment of utter despair, he (Paul) raises up in the midst and is found to be a rock on which all can trust, the inspirer of hope and the master mind which is able to direct and command as the crisis requires—in a word their savior” (Rackham). Barclay says, “The most useful people in the world are those who, being themselves brave, help others to be brave; and who, being themselves calm, bring to others the secret of confidence. Paul was like that; and all the followers of Jesus must be steadfast when others are in turmoil.”

AN EXAMPLE TO EMULATE

When I was growing up, we had heroes. Today, we have celebrities and, occasionally, a good “role model” for kids. What we need is an example to emulate. Jesus is, of course, our example and so is the Apostle Paul. God made Paul a *pattern* for us (1 Tim. 1:16) and he made himself an *example* all believers should follow (2 Thess. 3:9). Paul is an example in many ways, but one stands out among the rest. Paul constantly called himself a servant (Rom. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Titus 1:1; etc.). Exactly how is Paul an example? What are the specifics? The last chapter of Acts is an illustration of Paul, the servant, as an example to emulate.

Paul’s Helped Others

The Fire “Now when they had escaped, they then found out that the island was called Malta” (28:1). Having lost their ability to navigate (27:20), at the time of the shipwreck, they had no idea where they were. It was not until they made it to shore that they discovered they were on Malta, an island south of Sicily.

“And the natives showed us unusual kindness; for they kindled a fire and made us all welcome, because of the rain that was falling and because of the cold” (28:2). When they arrived on shore, it was raining. Hence, they were wet, cold, and shivering. Extending warm hospitality, the local residents were kind enough to build a fire for them. The Greek word translated “natives” is actually the Greek word “barbarian,” a word the Greeks used to describe anyone who spoke a foreign language (Bruce). The word simply meant that they were “ignorant of Greek,” with, perhaps, a hint that they were simple, rustic people (Marshall).

The Firewood “But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid *them* on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat, and fastened on his hand” (28:3). The great apostle stooped to pick up sticks for the fire.

The Fatal Bite Having gathered a bundle of sticks, as Paul was laying them on the fire, a poisonous snake crept from the fire and bit him on the hand. Lawrence of Arabia wrote, “When the fire drew hot a long black snake wounds slowly out into our group; we must have gathered it, torpid, with the twigs” (Lawrence, cited by Bruce). Alexander remarks that Paul’s assistance in keeping up the fire was an occasion for another proof of God’s special care over him. Some object to this story, claiming that there are no poisonous snakes on the island of Malta today. Bruce answers, “One might compare Ireland, which has been freed from snakes for long centuries, although tradition asserts that they were once plentiful there until they were banished.”

The Fallout “So when the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, ‘No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he has escaped the sea, yet justice does not allow to live’” (28:4). Seeing Paul was a prisoner, perhaps, because he was fastened to a soldier (Alexander), or because of the chains on his wrist (Rackham), the local residents infer that he was guilty of a crime and seeing him do that and by the snake they concluded that the crime was that of murder.

“But he shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm” (28:5). Paul shook off the creature into the fire. He suffered no harm (see Mk. 16:18). Is the snake a subtle symbol of Satan trying to hinder the messenger and message of God?

“However, they were expecting that he would swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But after they had looked for a long time and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god” (28:6). The residents were expecting at least some swelling of the hand and, maybe, even sudden death, but after a while seeing no harm come to Paul, they changed their mind concluding he was a god (14:11-19). Virgil said, “Justice, when she forsook the earth, left her last footsteps among the simple country folks” (Virgil, cited by Rackham).

They thought Paul was a god. Paul thought of himself as a servant. Barclay says Paul “was not ashamed to be useful in the smallest thing. It is told that Booker Washington, in his youth, walked hundreds of miles to one of the few universities which took in Negro students. When he got there, he was told that the classes were full. He was offered a job making beds and sweeping floors. He took it, and he swept those floors and made those beds so well that, very long before, they took him as a student, and he went on to become a scholar and administrator of his people. It is only the little man who refuses the little task.”

Paul Healed

The Hospitality “In that region there was an estate of the leading citizen of the island, whose name was Publius, who received us and entertained us courteously for three days” (28:7). In that region of Malta, that is, the northeastern coast (Alexander), the leading citizen of the island, a man named Publius, had an estate. The expression “leading citizen of the island” is probably an official designation; it appears on inscriptions found at Malta (Bruce). Publius extended hospitality to Paul and his company for three days.

The Healings “And it happened that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and dysentery. Paul went in to him and prayed, and he laid his hands on him and healed him” (28:8). While Paul was staying in Publius’ house, Publius’ father was sick with a fever and dysentery. Paul healed the sick father with prayer and the laying on of hands.

“So, when this was done, the rest of those on the island who had diseases also came and were healed” (28:9). Apparently, word spread throughout the whole island so that all who were sick came to be healed at the hand of the Apostle Paul.

The Honor “They also honored us in many ways; and when we departed, they provided such things as were necessary” (28:10). Because of Paul’s healing ministry, the residents of the island honored him and his party (“us”) in many ways. The honor probably included an honorarium or material gifts (Bruce). When they departed, they provided them with necessities for the journey, their necessities having been destroyed in the shipwreck. It has been suggested that the use of “us” perhaps indicates that Luke contributed to the healing of the sick (Rackham; Bruce).

Paul was able to heal because he had the gift of healing (Bruce). He did the signs of an apostle (2 Cor. 12:12). We are not apostles, but, like Luke (“us”), we can care for the physical needs of people.

Paul was Thankful

From Malta to Syracuse “After three months we sailed in an Alexandrian ship whose figurehead was the Twin Brothers, which had wintered at the island. And landing at Syracuse, we stayed three days” (28:11-12). After a three-month stay (Rackham: March) on the island of Malta, when navigation was considered safe (Alexander), Paul and his companions set sail on

another Alexandrian ship, which had wintered at the island. This one had figureheads of the Twin Brothers, the sons of Jupiter (Castor and Pollux), regarded by the ancients as the gods of navigation and guardians of the sea (Alexander). They landed at Syracuse, the famous capital of Sicily, and stayed there for three days, probably because of adverse winds (Rackham).

From Syracuse to Rome “From there we circled round and reached Rhegium. And after one day the south wind blew; and the next day we came to Puteoli,” (28:13). From Syracuse, they sailed to Rhegium and the next day to Puteoli. They covered 180 miles (Rackham) in two days (Bruce). Puteoli is the port of Rome (Barclay).

“Where we found brethren, and were invited to stay with them seven days. And so, we went toward Rome” (28:14). They spent seven days with fellow believers at Puteoli, another indication of the indulgent treatment of Paul, the prisoner, whatever the motive of the centurion (Alexander).

“And from there, when the brethren heard about us, they came to meet us as far as Appii Forum and Three Inns. When Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage” (28:15). A few miles from Puteoli was the Appian Way, one of the great Roman roads. Leaving Puteoli, they traveled overland to Appii Form, a hundred miles away (Rackham). Ten miles further down the road, another group of believers from Rome met Paul at Three Inns. To say the same thing another way, some met Paul at Appii Form, about 43 miles from Rome, and others met him at Three Inns, 33 miles from Rome (Barclay). Wiersbe comments, “Some saints will go farther than others.”

Helping others can be a thankless job. Paul was a grateful servant (28:15). He was thankful to God for the people who supported him and encouraged him (28:15).

Why did only one cleansed leper return to thank Jesus? The following are nine suggested reasons why the nine did not return: One waited to see if the cure was real. One waited to see if it would last. One said he would see Jesus later. One decided that he had never had leprosy. One said he would have gotten well anyway. One gave the glory to the priests. One said, “O, well, Jesus didn’t really do anything.” One said, “Any rabbi could have done it.” One said, “I was already much improved” (Charles L. Brown’s Newsletter, June 1990, p. 3).

Warren Wiersbe tells about a ministerial student in Evanston, Illinois, who was part of a life-saving squad. In 1860, a ship went aground on the shore of Lake Michigan near Evanston, and Edward Spencer waded again and again into the frigid waters to rescue 17 passengers. In the process, his health was permanently damaged. Some years later, at his funeral, it was noted that not one of the people he rescued ever thanked him (*Our Daily Bread*, 2/20/1994).

Paul Heralded the Gospel

The Meeting “Now when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard; but Paul was permitted to dwell by himself with the soldier who guarded him” (28:16). When they finally arrived at Rome, the centurion turned his prisoner over to the captain of the guard, but Paul was permitted to dwell by himself with the soldier guarding him (28:23), a member of the praetorian guard (Phil. 1:13).

“And it came to pass after three days that Paul called the leaders of the Jews together” (28:17a). When Paul had been in Rome for only three days, he called the Jewish leaders together.

So, when they had come together, he said to them: “Men *and* brethren, though I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans” (28:17b). Paul addresses the assembly of Jewish

leaders as “brethren,” that is, as fellow-Jews (Alexander). Identifying himself with them (“our”), Paul begins declaring that he had done nothing against the Jewish people or customs (24:14-16; 26:6-8, 21-23; see 1 Cor. 9:19-23). Nonetheless, at Jerusalem, he was delivered into the hands of the Romans as a prisoner. How can Paul say the Jews delivered him to the Romans when, in fact, he had declined the jurisdiction of the Sanhedrin and appealed to the imperial tribunal (25:9-12)? Alexander defends Paul’s statement, claiming that it was true, in fact, if not informed, that Paul was forced into the hands of the Romans by the murderous designs of the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. This conforms to the prophecy of Agabus (21:11).

“who, when they had examined me, wanted to let *me* go, because there was no cause for putting me to death” (28:18). Paul goes on to say that when the Romans examined him, they wanted to let him go, because they could find no cause for capital punishment. After Paul refutes the charges against him, Festus asks him if he would like to be tried before the council at Jerusalem (25:8-9), indicating Felix found no grounds for a capital offense.

“But when the Jews spoke against *it*, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar, not that I had anything of which to accuse my nation” (28:19). Since the Jews were determined to destroy him and Felix was unwilling to protect him, he was forced to assert his civil rights and appeal to Caesar. The appeal was a defensive measure and did not involve a charge against the Jews as a nation, which he still claims to be his nation (“my”).

“For this reason, therefore, I have called for you, to see *you* and speak with *you*, because for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain” (28:20). Paul explains to the Jewish leaders that he is the prisoner because of the hope of Israel. This is a diplomatic way of introducing the subject of the Messiah. As in Acts 23:6, 24:15, and 26:6-7 the hope of Israel is faith in the Messiah as predicted in the Scriptures (Alexander) and the resurrection (Marshall). It has been said that we really cannot know a person unless we hear that individual talk, especially about the things that really matter to him or her. When Paul got to Rome, he did not have to call this meeting, but he did. In doing so, it reveals what was close to his heart, reaching his own people with the gospel. Notice also that he is conciliatory toward his own nation but fateful to the truth.

“Then they said to him, “We neither received letters from Judea concerning you, nor have any of the brethren who came reported or spoken any evil of you” (28:21). The Jewish leaders responded by saying that they had not received letters from Jerusalem concerning Paul, nor have any of the brethren from Jerusalem reported or spoken against him. It is possible that a letter had been sent but had not yet arrived because of the difficulties of traveling during the winter (Bruce).

“But we desire to hear from you what you think; for concerning this sect, we know that it is spoken against everywhere” (28:22). On the other hand, they express an interest in “this sect,” which, they said, is spoken against everywhere. By “this sect,” they mean Christianity (Alexander).

The Message “So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at *his* lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening” (28:23). As a result of the initial meeting (28:22), they made an appointment to hear Paul’s explanation of Christianity. The meeting was held where Paul was staying. At that meeting, Paul explained the kingdom of God from the Hebrew Scriptures, attempting to persuade them that Jesus was the Messiah. This was not a preaching session; it was a discussion (“explained and solemnly testified;” see 20:7). The meeting lasted from early morning until evening, that is, all day (Alexander).

“And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved” (28:24). As usual, some were persuaded that Jesus is the Messiah and some were not.

“So when they did not agree among themselves, they departed after Paul had said one word: “The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers, saying, ‘Go to this people and say: ‘Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand; and seeing you will see, and not perceive. For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with *their* eyes and hear with *their* ears, lest they should understand with *their* hearts and turn, so that I should heal them’” (28:25-27). When they could not agree, they departed, but Paul said one other thing before they did. He reminded them of what the Holy Spirit said through Isaiah. Paul quotes Isaiah 6:9-10 (Mt. 13:13-15; Mk. 4:12; Lk. 8:10; Jn. 12: 39-40; Rom. 11:8). God told Isaiah to tell the people of Israel that they hear, but they do not understand. They see, but they do not perceive. Their lack of understanding and perception is because their hearts have grown dull. They have closed their eyes and ears to the Word of God. As Bruce points out, “There are none so deaf as those who will not hear” and “there are none so blind as those who will not see.” Marshall remarks that they have allowed themselves to become deaf and blind for fear that they might hear and see the disturbing Word of God. Thus, divine judgment rest upon them. The term “heart” is not a reference to just the emotions or the intellect, but to the whole person, comprehending both (Alexander).

The issue of election and free will has been called “insolvable to human intelligence” (Rackham). Dante said it is so hidden “in the abyss of the eternal law” that it is “cut off from all created sight” (Dante, cited by Rackham).

“Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!” (28:28). Paul concludes that since they have rejected the salvation of God, he will give it to the Gentiles, who will hear it.

“And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves” (28:29). After Paul finished speaking, the Jewish leader departed, but there was a great dispute among them. Paul deeply desired to win his people to Christ (22:19-20; Rom. 9:1-3; 10:1). He did his best to communicate to them, but their blindness and insensitivity to the truth prevented them from coming to Christ.

“Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him” (28:30-31). Paul spent the next two years in his own rented house preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about Jesus Christ to all who came to see him. The phrase “his own rented house” implies he had some source of income; under certain circumstances, prisoners could carry on their trade (Marshall). He did this with all confidence. No one forbid him to preach and teach (2 Tim. 2:9). As far as Paul was concerned, all of this was for the furtherance of the gospel (Phil. 1:12). “Nothing that man can do can will stop the progress and ultimate victory of the gospel” (Marshall).

The book of Acts begins with the kingdom of God (1:3) and concludes with the kingdom of God.

Paul was not only concerned about the physical needs of people; he was most concerned about their spiritual needs. Moreover, despite all that happened to him, he kept on going.

During his time in Rome, Paul penned the Prison Epistles: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. From these epistles, we know certain brethren were with him (Phil. 4:21), including Luke, Timothy, Aristarchus, Justin, and John Mark, the cousin of Barnabas (15:39), etc. It is generally conceded that Paul was released from this imprisonment, giving him

time to travel and write the three Pastoral Epistles: I Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus. According to tradition, he was later arrested and executed at Rome (for details, see Rackham pp. 510-512; Wiersbe, pp.151-152).

A story is told that Andrew Jackson's boyhood friends just could not understand how he became a famous general and the President of the United States. They knew of others who had greater talent but who never succeeded. One of Jackson's friends commented, "Why, Jim Brown, who lived right down the pike from Jackson, was smarter and could throw Andy three times out of four in a wrestling match. But look where Andy is now." Another friend responded, "How did there happen to be a fourth time? Didn't they usually say three times and out?" "Sure, they were supposed to, but not Andy. He would never admit he was beat—he would never stay 'threwed.' Jim Brown would get tired, and on the fourth try, Andrew Jackson would throw him and be the winner." Andrew Jackson just wouldn't stay 'threwed'! Andrew Jackson knew the secret of shaking it off.

Summary: Believers should emulate the example of the Apostle Paul, who was a grateful servant, helping in any way he could, healing, and heralding the gospel.

Obviously, this is the end of Acts. Rackham says that from the care with which he composed it, Luke intended for the last paragraph to form the conclusion of his book.

Why did Luke stop the story here? Did Paul appear before Caesar? If he did, what happened? Most say that Luke stopped because he accomplished his purpose; he "performed his task" (Alexander; Rackham; Barclay). Alexander says, "As soon as he has traced the course of Christ and Christianity from the Holy City to the Mistress of the World, he has already shown the virtual fulfillment of the promise and the plan with which the history begins, 'Ye shall be my witnesses, both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the world'" (also see Rackham). Marshall says the closing picture is "a climax to the book in that the missionary program of Acts 1:8 is now brought to a decisive point: the gospel has come to the capital city, and it is proclaimed without hindrance to the Gentiles; the churches on the brink of further expansion with Paul's hope of reaching Spain (Rom. 15:24, 28) in the background and indicating the direction for further advance. The church is thus given its marching orders: Rome is a stage on the way and not the final goal."

The great lesson of the final chapters of the book of Acts is that nothing can truly hinder the purpose of God. Neither storm nor snakes could stop the sovereign will of God. Paul epitomizes the ideal scriptural mailman as it can be said, "Neither rain, nor sleet, nor dark of night can keep this courageous courier from the swift completion of his appointed task."

Nothing hindered Paul from being a grateful servant. He was falsely accused, beaten, shipwrecked, and snake-bitten. He shook it off and kept going.

Someone has said, "When you are stricken, shake it off. Paul faced a storm, a shipwreck, and a serpent bit him. He was wounded and you may be too, by your foes and friends, by the ungratefulness of others, the unfaithfulness of others, and the unthoughtfulness of others. Do what Paul did. Shake it off. When you are slandered, shake it off. Paul was accused of being a murderer; he was falsely accused, unjustly, but he just shook it off. Another has suggested that we shake off the viper of discouragement and criticism (murderer), and low expectations (they expected him to die)."

The mule had been like part of the family. The mule pulled the plow. The mule pulled the wagon to town and church. One day, the mule got old and his vision was limited. The mule got near the well and fell in. The old farmer told his sons to get the shovels and bury the mule in the

well. The mule could not believe his friends were throwing dirt on him. After all he had done for this family, the mule cried and was angry. They were going to bury him alive. The dirt came in and covered the mule's back. The mule shook the dirt off and stepped up. Over and over, the mule would shake off the dirt and step up, until, finally, the mule was back on top of the ground again. It was a joy to plow for the family now; he had learned to shake it off and step up. You might have to learn to shake it off and step up.

THE BIG PICTURE

My wife, Patricia, made a most interesting image on a jacket with the help of her grandson, Joshua. She had him put his hands in ink and then put them, side by side, on her white jacket. Then she had him put one foot in ink and place it underneath the two hands. When I saw it, I immediately recognized that it was two hands and one foot of Joshua. I didn't understand that the heel had a red dot on it. Why did she put a red dot here? To my shock, I was informed that this was a picture of Rudolph, the Red-nose reindeer; the red dot was Rudolph's nose! I had focused on the parts (their hands and the foot) and missed the big picture. That's the way some people study the Bible. They look at individual parts, such as a verse or statement, and miss the bigger picture.

A book of the Bible is like a movie. A motion picture consists of thousands upon thousands of individual pictures. Each of those pictures can be understood individually, but put together in a sequence, they tell a story different from each of the pictures in the film. Notice it is called a "motion picture." Likewise, each paragraph or individual narrative in a book contains a message, but those individual messages are strung together in a book to present an even bigger message. Having looked at each narrative in the book of Acts, it would be appropriate to ask, "What is the big picture of the whole book?" Let's look at the big picture and some major movements in Acts.

The Message of the Book

The Subject The subject of the book of Acts is the continuing work of Jesus Christ ("and" in Acts 1:1).

The Message The message is the continuing work of Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit through men, primarily Peter and Paul, from the Jews in Jerusalem to the Gentiles in Rome (1:8).

The Structure There are two major ways to view the structure of Acts. One is geographical and the other is biographical. Geographically, Acts 1:8 spells out the structure of the book: Jerusalem (Acts 1-7), Judea/Samaria (Acts 8-12), the end of the earth (Acts 13-28). Acts 1-7 takes place in Jerusalem. Acts 8:1 says they were scattered abroad throughout Judea and Samaria. Beginning in chapter 13, Paul commences his missionary journeys to the regions beyond.

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| I. The Lord's Work by the Holy Spirit
through the Men in Jerusalem | 1:1-7:6 |
| II. The Lord's Work by the Holy Spirit
through the Men in Judea and Samaria | 8:1-12:25 |
| III. The Lord's Work by the Holy Spirit
through the Men to the end of the Earth | 13:1-28:31 |

There is also a deliberate structuring of the material around the acts of Peter (Acts 1-12) and the acts of Paul (Acts 13-28).

Purpose One of the purposes of Acts is to chronicle the spread of the work inaugurated by Jesus, which He continued by the Holy Spirit through the men from Jerusalem to Rome. The

church was connected with the work of the risen and ascended Christ. There was also the need to show that Christianity was one whether the believers were Jews, proselytes, Samaritans, Gentiles, or former followers of John the Baptist. One of the purposes of Acts is to defend Paul. Paul's authority is vindicated by demonstrating that he did everything Peter did. His experiences and missionary labors, especially his arrest and imprisonment, must be seen in the right light. Was he a traitor to his people and an apostate from the Law? Was he an impostor who deserved all the opposition and persecution that he received? Was he an insurrectionist or an instrument in the hand of God?

Messages in the Book

Within the big picture are some small pictures. When seen together, the small pictures develop the big picture. Those little pictures include such episodes as the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, the conversion of the Apostle Paul, the spreading of the gospel to the Gentiles, the Jerusalem Council, and the sending of Paul and Barnabas to the Gentiles. Other messages helped develop the storyline of the big picture of Acts.

Leadership The message of the book is that Jesus is working by the Holy Spirit through men. At first, the Lord worked through the apostles; they were the leaders (cf. 6:2). The apostles turned over the leadership of the churches to elders. When Paul and Barnabas took money to Jerusalem, they gave it to the elders (11:30). On the first missionary journey, when Paul and Barnabas established new churches, they appointed elders in each church (14:23). From Paul's speech to the elders of Ephesus and it is evident that the main job of the elders was to see to it that the flock was fed ("shepherd" in 20:28) and to protect the flock from wolves (20:29), as well as black sheep (20:30).

Today, believers need to be instructed and protected. When the Pew Research Center's Form on Religion and Public Life conducted a nationwide poll of 4013 adults, they found that many Americans attend services outside their religion and blend Christianity with Eastern and New Age beliefs. Twenty-four percent of Americans attend religious services outside their own faith. About 25% of those surveyed expressed beliefs in New Age or Eastern religious principles such as reincarnation and the presence of spiritual energy in physical objects. The number of Americans who said that they had interacted with a ghost has doubled over the last 13 years, from 9% to 18%. About 60% of those surveyed also expressed belief or reported having an experience with a variety of supernatural phenomena, such as believing in astrology, being in touch with the dead or consulting a psychic (Nicole Santa Cruz, "More Americans 'Mix and Match' Religions, Poll Finds." *Los Angeles Times*, December 10, 2009, p. A27).

The Lord works by the Holy Spirit through elders to feed and protect the flock.

Fellowship Before He ascended, Jesus told the apostles to go into all the world and make disciples. They were to do that by preaching the gospel, baptizing believers, and teaching those believers (Mt. 28:19-20), but they were to wait until the Holy Spirit came (1:4). When the Holy Spirit descended, the apostles did precisely what Jesus told them to do in the Great Commission. They preached the gospel (2:14-36). They baptized 3000 converts (2:41) and taught them (2:42). In other words, they started a church (2:47), which is what Paul did on his missionary journeys.

"Most people in the modern world who would accept Christianity but would reject the *church* (i.e., assembly or local congregation) as the simple human instrument in the strategy of God's have divorced themselves from the Apostolic tradition. Were the apostles to return to

earth today, they would have little time for those who imagined that there can be a churchless Christianity” (McBirnie, *The Search for the Twelve Apostles*, p. 172).

Within churches, believers are to fellowship with one another (2:42). In other words, believers are to minister to one another. Most churches draw a master plan and spend their time recruiting manpower and money. Pure religion is to minister to orphans and widows.

Discipleship Outside churches, believers are to spread the Word. The leaders are to teach the Word (6:2); the believers are to spread the Word (8:4). The book of Acts is not just about leaders; it contains the stories of such “layman” as Stephen, Philip, and Aquila and Priscilla.

To be involved in the ministry of evangelism, you need to know the Lord and the gospel. The issue is not how much you know about the Bible and theology. If you do not know much, someone always knows less. If you can read at an eighth-grade level, there is someone who reads at a fifth-grade level you can help.

The issue is not about credentials. One of the major subplots of Acts is that the Lord wanted Paul to preach to political leaders in Rome. Who would be best qualified to deliver the gospel to congressmen, senators, and even the President of the United States? Let’s get one of the most well-respected politicians converted and let him witness to other politicians. In Acts, the Lord did it by converting a religious fanatic and seeing to it that he was a prisoner. In other words, the Lord uses unlikely people. When he wrote his gospel, Luke went out of his way to point out how the Lord used women, who were not considered to be equal to men. He used shepherds to announce the birth of His Son. Shepherds were not qualified to testify in court. This would be like using a chauffeur to win the politician to Christ.

Paul Lichterman, a professor of sociology and religion at USC, said that over a lifetime, more Americans would try out a different religion than would stay true to one faith (Nicole Santa Cruz, “More Americans ‘Mix and Match’ Religions, Poll Finds.” *Los Angeles Times*, December 10, 2009, p. A27).

Summary: By the Holy Spirit, the Lord uses people to make disciples.

To say it all very simply: The Savior went up. The Spirit came down. The church went out. The lost came in.

The book of Acts contains illustrations of the critical, the curious, the convinced, and the committed, who were communicating spiritual truth. Which are you?

At the end of the book of Acts, the sky is falling; God is not. Paul is in prison, but the gospel is not. The book of Acts does not end with “THE END.” We do not need good circumstances; we need good news. We should be involved in God’s work and let nothing stop us. Paul withstood the academic atmosphere in Athens and, the corruption of Corinth, the riot in Ephesus, and the beating in Jerusalem. He survived storms and snakes.

The lion was proud of his mastery of the animal kingdom. One day he decided to make sure all the other animals knew he was king of the jungle. He was so confident that he bypassed the smaller animals and went straight to the bear. “Who is the king of the jungle?” the lion asked. “Why, of course, you are,” the bear replied. The lion gave a mighty roar of approval. Next, he asked the tiger, “Who is the king of the jungle?” The tiger quickly responded, “Everyone knows that YOU are, oh, mighty lion.” Next on the list was the elephant. “Who is the king of the jungle?” the lion asked. The elephant immediately grabbed the lion with his trunk, whirled him around in the air five or six times and slammed him into a tree. Then he pounded him onto the ground several times, dunked him underwater in a nearby lake and finally dumped him out on the shore. The lion—beaten, bruised, and battered—struggled to his feet.

“Look,” he told the elephant, “Just because you don’t know the answer is no reason to get upset.”

Are we as committed as Paul? Tony Campolo tells of being invited to speak at a lady’s meeting. There were 300 women there. Before he spoke, the president of the organization read a letter from a missionary. It was a very moving letter. In the letter, the missionary expressed a need for \$4,000 to care for an emergency that had cropped up. So the president of the organization said, “We need to pray that God will provide the resources to meet the needs of this missionary. Brother Campolo, will you please pray for us?”

Tony Campolo said, “No.” Startled, she said, “I beg your pardon.” He said, “No, I won’t pray for that.” He said, “I believe that God has already provided the resources and that all we need to do is give. Tell you what I’m going to do. I’m going to step up to this table and give every bit of cash I have in my pocket. And if all of you will do the same thing, I think God has already provided the resources.”

The organization’s president chuckled a bit and said, “Well, I guess we get the point. He is trying to teach us that we all need to give sacrificially.” Campolo said, “No, that is not what I am trying to teach you. I’m trying to teach you that God has already provided for this missionary. All we need to do is give it. Here, I’m going to put down all of the money I have with me.”

He wrote, “I only had \$15 in my pocket, so I wasn’t too worried about that.” So he put down his \$15 and looked at the president of the organization. Reluctantly, she opened her purse, took out all her money, about \$40, and put it on the table. One by one, the rest of the ladies filed by and put their money on the table. When the money was counted, they had collected more than \$4,000.” Tony Campolo said, “Now, here is the lesson. God always supplies for our needs, and He supplied for this missionary, too. The only problem was we were keeping it for ourselves. Now let’s pray and thank God for His provision.”

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