

Acts

INTRODUCTION

In the Gospel of Luke, the author, Dr. Luke, shows what Christ *began* to do on earth; Luke also wrote the Book of Acts, in which he shows what Christ *continued* to do by the Holy Spirit. The ascension of the Lord is the closing scene in the Gospel of Luke, and in the Book of Acts it is the opening scene.

Luke then proceeds to report on the first sermon by a disciple, the first miracle by a disciple, the first step towards organizing the Christian movement, the first orchestrated persecution of believers, the first Christian martyr, the first non-Jewish convert, and the first missionary trip.

The Gospels set forth the Son of Man who came to die for our sins. Acts shows the continued workings of the Son of God in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Gospels speak of the crucified and risen Savior; the Book of Acts portrays Him as the ascended and exalted Lord and Leader of His Body, the Church. In the Gospels, we are given the revealing teachings of Christ, and in Acts we see the effects of these teachings through the acts of the apostles.

This book truly becomes the acts of the apostles through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is mentioned about seventy times. “*Ye shall be My witnesses*” is the heart of this book, and the word “*witness*” is used over thirty times.

God’s Spirit making bold witnesses out of ordinary people is the reason behind the phenomenal success of the first-generation church. He remains the power and wisdom for today, and it is incumbent upon each believer to learn His ways and walk in His power for Christ’s culminating work of this century.

Acts 1:1-7

The "Acts of the Apostles" has been variously called "The Acts of the Holy Spirit" and "The Acts of the Ascended Lord." Both names are appropriate, much more appropriate, indeed, than the more ordinary title of "Acts of the Apostles." This book records not only the first chapters of Church history, but the first acts of the Holy Spirit on earth and the ascended Lord in heaven.

"I came from the Father and entered the world"; again, "I am leaving the world and going back to the Father" (John 16:28), "It is for your good that I am going away.... If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father" (16:7; 14:28). In these and many similar intimations, the Lord had prepared them for His departure, and made them understand that His work on earth was now finished and that His ascension was only part of His great redeeming plan.

His preparations for the ascension were deliberate and complete. He did not go with unseemly haste, but lingered for 40 days, meeting with them often and finishing all that remained of His prophetic ministry on earth before He assumed His priestly and kingly functions in the heavens. "He showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive" (Acts 1:3). He left no doubt whatever of His identity, and He gave them full instructions concerning the kingdom of God. John tells us that if all the things He said had been recorded, the whole world could not contain the books that should be written. We may be sure then that the practice and example of the apostles, as recorded in the book of Acts, were covered by explicit directions from the Master's lips in messages that have not come to us except as we can infer them from the manner in which the apostles themselves obeyed them.

(The Christ in the Bible, A. B. Simpson)

Acts was placed as the fifth book in order of the 27 books of the New Testament—and perhaps divinely so, for it is the connecting link between the gospels and the epistles. This book (Acts) records the transition from:

Judaism	to	Christianity
Law	to	Grace
Kingdom	to	Church (Body of Christ)

Explain what Jesus meant in Acts 1:6 when He spoke concerning the time of restoration of the kingdom of Israel.

Rom. 1:16 Rom. 3:21-23 Eph. 3:8-11

Acts 1:8

The Holy Spirit comes, not to be the final factor in the Christian dispensation, but as a temporary administration: first, to finish Christ's earthly work, and secondly, to prepare the way for His second coming. But we are not prepared to understand the coming of the Spirit until we first see these two clear points—the departing and returning Lord—and between them, like a parenthesis, the dispensation of the Holy Spirit to follow the one and herald the other. The business therefore, of the Holy Spirit, and the Church through which He operates, is to bring Christ back again, and so to complete the ministry which He began on earth that He can come to bring its final stage in the setting up of His millennial kingdom on the very place where He was rejected and crucified.

Having understood this, the place of the Spirit's dispensation, let us look at the promise of the Spirit as given us by the departing Lord.

1. He was to be a Person as real as Christ Himself. It is not something that we receive from God in this deeper life, but Somebody who comes to make Himself known to us, to make Himself real to us, and to be in us the source of all strength and happiness.

2. He was to come as the Spirit of power. Man is the weakest of beings, weaker than his own sinful nature, weaker than the elements around him, weaker even than the brutes over whom he was sent to exercise dominion. But the Holy Spirit comes to give him power, to make his life effectual, and when the Holy Spirit comes into our life He does something. He accomplishes something. He is more than a sentiment, a feeling, a fancy. He is an infinite force that makes our life powerful, and enables us to accomplish all for which we are called as the disciples of Christ. It is power over sin, power over self, power over the world, power over sickness, power over Satan, power to be, to do, to suffer and to overcome.

3. The Holy Spirit does not work apart from us. The Master died and trod the wine press alone, single-handed, and went to the dragon's den and destroyed him. But the Holy Spirit is not like Christ. We are His temple. He resides in us and works through us, and unless we yield ourselves to be His instruments, He is unable to carry out His supreme purposes, and the great exalted Head is like a man with a paralyzed body that refuses to perform the functions for which that brain has power sufficient, but the paralyzed members are unequal to the effort. Therefore, the Spirit claims us as the subjects of His working.

4. The Spirit's power is to be shown chiefly in our witnessing for Christ. That is the form of our service. We are not to witness of truth merely, not to become wise and wonderful orators or teachers, but we are to be witnesses of Him. I do not know how to express this better than to say that our business is to make Jesus real to men, so to live and so to speak that they shall see in us and through us a power and a Presence that will make them long for the same loving and almighty help in their lives. Thus to minister Christ to men is the highest service to which we can be called, and the most helpful thing we can do for weak and erring men.

5. The sphere of their ministry was to be an ever-expanding one: "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (1:8). Of course, we cannot now stop to follow this widening circle as the apostolic Church followed it through their great missionary campaign until the whole inhabited world had received the message of Christ. This remarkable verse is just a table of contents of the whole book of Acts, and the chapters that follow are best commentary upon it, as successively we see the gospel planted first in Jerusalem, then throughout all of Judea, next in Samaria, and finally in the remotest heathen nations.

Doubtless, also, we have here a hint for the individual Christian, of the Spirit-filled life and service that will always begin at home, our Jerusalem; and then reach out to our relatives ("all Judea"); and next find its way to our very enemies, those farther removed from us and having, perhaps, no natural claim upon us—Samaria; and then finally will lead us out in sympathy and service to be in some sense missionaries to the very heathen lands and send the gospel to the uttermost part of the earth.

6. They were to tarry for this baptism of power. Without it they must not attempt their work, nor must we. If the Lord Himself would not begin His earthly ministry until He had received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, how much less dare we presume to go forth in our own strength and represent Him!

Why should they need to tarry? First, perhaps because the fullness of the time must first come, and the Pentecostal hour which, according to the Hebrew calendar, was to be interpreted and fulfilled in the coming of the Spirit, should have arrived. But secondly, and doubtless much more probably, because they themselves were not ready, and the waiting days were necessary for their spiritual preparation, to bring them to the end of themselves, to show them their need, to give them time to search their hearts, to deepen the hunger and the longing which were necessary for them to appreciate the blessing, and to make full room and right of way in their hearts for His indwelling and outworking.

And so let us wait for the promise of the Father. Let us receive in all His fullness and the blessed Holy Spirit; and if any reader has not yet proved this promise true, be encouraged, dear friend, to follow even the dim light that is now shining in your heart, even the faintest longing that is springing in your soul. No words that we could speak would make you understand this experience until it comes to you. If there is within you a sense of something that you need and do not have—a cry for God in some way to give you purity, victory, power and rest—that is the blessing already begun. If you follow on to know the Lord, then surely will you know Him. He would never give you that longing desire and disappoint it when you come to tarry at His feet. Wait for the promise of the Father, "Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near" (Isaiah 55:6), and "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

(The Christ in the Bible, A. B. Simpson)

As Christians, explain how each of the following ministries of the Holy Spirit affects our lives:

- 1. Makes God known to us.**
- 2. Gives us power over sin, self, the world, sickness, satan, power to be, to do, to suffer to overcome.**
- 3. Makes us instruments for his use.**
- 4. Makes Jesus real to people.**
- 5. Enables us to witness for Christ.**
- 6. Gives us the baptism of power. Should we have to tarry for this?**

Acts 1:9-11

The incidents of His departure were most impressive and glorious. He had just disappeared from their view, and they were in danger of thinking that He had gone forever, therefore it is necessary to arouse them by another vision. And so, as they intently watch the distant and receding cloud, lo, two shining angels stand beside them, who speak to them as visitors from another world: "Men of Galilee,....why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

(The Christ in the Bible, A. B. Simpson)

With the ascension of Christ into His new rule from heaven, how was the transfer of power and authority to take place; what would the disciples receive, and from whom? Following this, who would receive the Gospel of Grace (to whom would it be preached)?

Acts 1:8 Acts 2:17-21 Acts 2:33, 39

Now that Jesus has ascended to heaven what is His current role?

Eph. 1:20-23 1 John 2:1

Acts 1:12-26

Peter feels the number twelve is somehow sacred and should be restored—this is his own idea for he has had no leading of the Lord to do anything but wait. However, this is the same Peter who drew the sword to help the Lord at His arrest. And the Peter who said, “I’m going fishing,” when the Lord told them to wait in Galilee (John 21:3). Jesus had firmly told them, “Without Me ye can do nothing,” (John 15:5), but Peter had not yet been trained by the Holy Spirit.

Peter gave these instructions: (1) the new disciple must be one of the 120 then present, and (2) he had to have been in the company of the apostles from the time of Jesus’ baptism to His ascension, so he could bear witness to Jesus’ resurrection. This was purely human judgment, and if God had more in mind for His apostles, then Peter was out of order. As for the two names that were chosen, neither history nor the New Testament speaks of either of them again.

Most scholars believe that Paul later would be God’s choice, for after he was filled with the Spirit, he was as well qualified as Peter to be an apostle (Gal. 1:11-17, Gal. 2:7-9). Paul also had one great qualification which no appointee could match—he was commissioned directly by the risen Lord.

After Pentecost, the method of using lots for reaching decisions is never heard of again, for this manner was after the flesh, and now they had the Holy Spirit’s guidance continually.

(Lovett’s Lights on Acts, C.S. Lovett-paraphrased)

Do you think the disciples were justified in their action to choose another apostle? Why should the number remain at twelve? What is Paul’s role among them, for he was later anointed the Apostle to the Gentiles?

John 1:48 Rom. 1:16 Phil. 2:5

Was casting lots ever a sanctioned method for making decisions?

Acts 2:1-3

The disciples, watching in awe, were within arm’s length of the glory of God, for this may have been the Shekinah glory at close range. The Lord was indeed returning in Spirit, and this visible manifestation symbolized His presence. The sound, like a mighty rushing wind, and the tongues of fire symbolized the diffusion of Christ in the Spirit. It revealed how each Christian could have the *one* Christ. Omnipresence had been a truth beyond them, but they could understand this, for they saw it happen.

Prior to this the disciples had Christ’s righteousness by *imputation* (Rom. 4:3), but now they have His righteousness by *impartment*, which is the experience of receiving Christ’s nature by regeneration (2 Pet. 1:4); therefore, each had all there was to have of Christ. The promised Replacement had come to be in them (John 14:16-18)—He was in them and they were in Him!

(Lovett’s Lights on Acts, C.S. Lovett-paraphrased)

How much of the Spirit do we realize and know is available to us in all His fullness when we repent and come to Christ for forgiveness? And what is meant by the continuous fillings of the Holy Spirit?

Mic. 3:8 John 3:35, 36 Luke 4:1 Rom. 8:11 Rom. 15:16 Gal. 5:22, 23 2 Thess. 2:13 1 John 2:20, 27 2 Pet. 1:4 John 14:16-18

Acts 2:4-14

The purpose of the speaking in various languages at Pentecost was in fulfillment of Jesus’ command that the Gospel should begin in Jerusalem, and then go into all the world. It was to the Jews first. In the providence of God, Jews from every part of the world were present at the Feast. There were no Gentiles addressed, and among the 3,000 converted on that day, there were none but Jews.

Notice, Jews from every nation under Heaven, and at least sixteen countries are mentioned in verses 9 to 11.

These are all Jews or Jewish proselytes. Here they are gathered, and they are to spread the message of the Gospel to the whole world. Hence the speaking in tongues. It was to proclaim the Gospel message by the nation destined to tell it to all the world. Then these Jews from all these nations went back to their homes all over the world knowing the message of the crucified, resurrected Christ, having heard it declared in their own language and dialect.

(Pentecost and After, M. R. DeHaan)

From your personal understanding of the mighty power poured out by the Holy Spirit, resulting in the utterly amazing conversion of 3,000 Jews at one time, please speak to this “visual aid” that God brought about on this day, which is 50 days following the Passover Feast. Would you say that He is introducing His new Church and the Age of Grace in a mighty dramatic way?

Acts 2:15-21

The prophet Joel used farm language in speaking of the Spirit's coming. It would be like rain falling freely on everyone without regard for age, sex, or rank. Men, women, children and even servants could receive Him, for there was to be no distinction. The imagery of rain is most apt for picturing the coming of Christ in the Spirit, for the outpouring speaks of Christ's availability, which is another way of expressing His omnipresence. All during the last days, says Peter, anyone can be saved, for Christ has come in the Spirit and anyone can receive Him. Jesus is the “gift of God” (Rom. 6:23). The gift of the Spirit is the gift of Christ. As full of the Spirit as he was, Peter was yet unaware that this promise included the Gentiles—He still has to learn this from the Lord (Acts 10:9-34).

Joel's prophecy also spells out precisely the terminal points of the “last days.” There is a time span between verses 18 and 19—one which is now 2000 years long. While the beginning of the last days was marked by great joy and spiritual blessing, the end of that age is to be characterized by destruction and disaster. Many are looking for a repeat performance of Pentecost, but it won't come. The days will grow increasingly troublesome and faith will all but vanish from the earth. John's description of God's Day of Wrath in Rev. 6:12 is also based on this same prophecy in Joel. The slaughter on the earth will be horrific (Rev. 14:20). Only the return of the Lord will end the carnage (Matt. 24:22, 29, 30).

(Lovett's Lights on Acts, C.S. Lovett)

When do you believe the rest of Joel's prophecy will be fulfilled? Does that prophecy apply in any way to our present day—and what then is expedient upon us as Christians if this tribulation is about to begin?

Acts 14:22 Rom. 5:3 Rom. 8:35-37 Rom. 12:12 2 Cor. 7:4 Eph. 3:13

Acts 2:22-38

After Peter had explained the strange happenings to the assembled crowd, he began his first sermon, and the power of the Holy Spirit is greatly manifest in and through him—he spoke as never before! The entire message was addressed to Israel—Jews only, and we shall see that it was the second offer to them of the Kingdom—the Kingdom which they had once refused. When this offer is again refused, then the Gospel would go out into all the Gentile world. The order of Christ's commission was *first* in Jerusalem and Judaea to the nation of Israel, *then* to Samaria, and *finally*, to the uttermost part of the earth. But here Peter addresses “Ye men of Israel”—it was to Jews only.

Notice now his message. Peter was led to bring to Israel the message of the rejected Christ. He quotes freely from the Old Testament with which his hearers were familiar, and then goes on to proclaim the Gospel—the message of a crucified, buried, risen Christ—their true Messiah! Then he quotes from David to show that this was truly the Messiah King whom they had rejected and slain.

With this, great conviction came upon the crowd, and in reply to their question of “What shall we do?”, he says, “Repent and be baptized..” The reason for his answer was because he was speaking to the very people who had openly rejected Jesus, and now they therefore must also openly acknowledge and own Him as their Messiah. They already believed in the name of the Father and Holy Ghost, but now they must assert their faith in Jesus Christ whom they rejected. Baptism for these Jews was a condition to prove they had repented of their rejection of Jesus.

The offer must first be made to the nation of Israel, and after that the message would go into Samaria and then the uttermost parts of the earth. If the nation of Israel had received this second offer of the Kingdom, their Messiah would have returned, but God knew this offer would also be rejected, and so planned His program for the Church after the Gospel has been given *to the Jew first*, and rejected by them.

(Pentecost and After, M. R. DeHaan—paraphrased)

We can understand from these Scriptures that the Jews had thought that a “real” Messiah could not possibly die, and that when he came he would make his enemies His footstool and rule over them (Ps. 110:1-2). **How do you think the Jews felt knowing scripture like that in Psalms 110 and now knowing of Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection?**

Acts 2:39-47

Three thousand souls were added to the Church of 120 and all were baptized that day in the Holy Spirit. To the Jewish nation, Pentecost was an occurrence that strongly reminded them of the Mt. Sinai experience following their escape from Egyptian bondage, and it occurred on the same day of the year. At that time, while Moses was in the mount receiving the Ten Commandments from God, below in the valley with Aaron awaiting Moses’ return, the people began demanding a “god” to worship, and Aaron allowed them to make a golden calf for that purpose. When Moses returned and saw their abject idolatry he turned to God who brought down absolute judgment upon them, and as a result of that day, 3000 people perished! Contrast this to the 3000 souls becoming believers at Pentecost!

Then follows a brief picture of an Early Church meeting. It was the essence of simplicity. It was characterized by the following: 1) Bible study–apostles’ doctrine; 2) Fellowship–testimony; 3) Breaking of bread–remembering the Lord; and 4) Prayers.

Since they were led by the Holy Spirit, there was a complete absence of complex structure. All the complexity of our present-day church organizations was missing. Just a company of believers led by the Holy Spirit to listen to the Word, give their testimony, remember the Lord and pray; and then go out everywhere witnessing for their Lord and Christ.

The second chapter of Acts closes with a picture of “*Bible communism*” which is entirely opposite to the political communism we know today. Theirs was the Kingdom ideal. The apostles were still offering the Kingdom to Israel, and in the Millennium when Christ shall be King, this will be the voluntary rule. There will be no poverty, everyone will have enough, by equal distribution of God’s physical blessings when every man shall sit under his own vine and his own fig tree.

These early Christians were a despised company. They were persecuted and ignored, slighted and disregarded by the world. They were waiting for Messiah to return and set up the Kingdom, and so they formed this community program. This was not mandatory, but entirely on a voluntary basis; no one was forced to share all his possessions with others.

Their ways became a practice while the hope of the Kingdom was burning brightly, and it will work in the Kingdom Age when every knee shall bow to Christ.

(Pentecost and After, M. R. DeHaan–paraphrased)

Is a community program, like the early church, something we should be doing today? How do you decide how much belongs to the Lord and how much belongs to you?

Mal. 3:8-10 Rom. 14:5 1 Cor. 9:9-14, 19-23

Acts 3:1-26

Peter and John differed greatly in age, in gift, and in point of view. They had been rivals; now they walked together. It was at three in the afternoon that this incident took place. As they climbed the Temple steps, they must have spoken of the many times that the Master had walked at their side. But they realized, too, that He was still as near as ever, and so they became the means of linking this withered man to His glorious health-giving power. It was because Jesus went with them that the healed man was able to become the fourth of the group.

The gate was beautiful, but it could not heal. More is needed than beauty or art. We may have neither the silver of profound intellect, nor the golden speech of Chrysostom, but we must see that we have something to give to a paralyzed and perishing world. Let us so move among men as to lead them to expect that we have something to give, and then give them Jesus. The lame man needed strength, and this is the divine gift of the Gospel. “It is the power of God unto salvation.” The Savior makes us able to walk and leap in God’s ways.

(Through the Bible Day by Day, F. B. Meyer)

The healing of this lame man occurred in the same place where Jesus had healed the blind man of John 9, and now Peter and John spoke and healed in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene. **What do you think this man now sensed as being in the lives of these former fishermen?**

Rom. 8:9-11, 20, 21 Rom. 15:1-3 Eph. 2:8-10 Eph. 5:1, 2, 8-10

What is meant by “the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the age began?” (Acts 3:21)

Gen. 12:2, 3 Deut. 30:3 2 Sam. 7:16 Zech. 12:8 Rom. 8:18-23 Rev. 21:1-7

Acts 4:1-22

The Sadducees are particularly mentioned, because they were the agnostics of the age and had no belief in the unseen and eternal. The fact of our Lord's resurrection was, therefore, especially obnoxious to them. The captain of the Temple, who was head of the Levitical guard, was probably their nominee. How weak man shows himself when he sets himself against God! All that they could do was to shut the apostles up, but they could not bind nor imprison the living Spirit or the speech of one saved soul to another, and so the numbers of disciples kept mounting up.

Peter must have contrasted this with his former appearance in that hall. Then he trusted in his own power; now he was specially filled with the Holy Spirit for a great and noble confession. The name of Jesus stands for His glorious being. It was because the man had come into vital union with the ever-living Christ that disease was stayed and health restored. The name of Jesus rings through these chapters like a sweet refrain. Evidently He was living and at hand, or the streams of power and grace could not have poured forth to make desert lives begin to blossom as the garden of the Lord.

(Through the Bible Day by Day, F. B. Meyer)

The Sadducees were "grieved that they (Peter and John) taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead" (Acts 4:2). At Calvary when Jesus was put to death, it truly seemed that wicked men held all the power. Now, in this Scripture, God Himself has completely turned this around. **Complete the following statements:**

Just eight weeks before this present situation, this ruling body had put Christ to death, hoping that would finish the "Christian" message. **Would the Sanhedrin understand Peter's accusation that came from Psalm 118:22, and Peter's statement, You are the _____ who rejected the _____? Could they realize they were fulfilling this prophecy? The mouths of these rulers were stopped by seeing the same power and boldness in Peter and John that they had seen in _____. The prohibitions of man can't carry any weight when they conflict with God's commands—and hadn't these rulers and priests been the so-called teachers of the Pentateuch (also known as the Torah)? (Answer yes or no) _____**

Acts 4:23-35

Like draws like; Judas went to his own place, and the apostles to their own company. The best answer to threats is prayer. The apostles' one petition just then was for boldness. They scorned to ask for their own safety; it was enough if Jesus was glorified.

What a note of jubilant triumph was in that glorious prayer, offered by this threatened little band! They realized that they were under the special protection of God, who had made the world, had spoken by the prophets, and was the Father of Jesus. They thought that more miracles of healing would promote their cause, but though they did not realize it at the time, their unity, love, hope, willingness to share their goods, coupled with their intrepid bearing, were their most potent arguments. Notice that in their consciousness, it was God's hand that was being stretched out to heal, though their hands were the immediate channel of its beneficent operations. They had been filled before, but they were filled again. It is our privilege to claim repeated infillings to make good our leakage and evaporation.

(Through the Bible Day by Day, F. B. Meyer)

Can you agree that these new Spirit-filled believers were being introduced to spiritual warfare? What rights and strengths has our Lord given us as we, too, go through spiritual warfare and truly engage our enemy?

Mark 16:17, 18 Acts 16:16-18 1 Cor. 12:10 Eph. 6:10-18

Acts 4:36 - Acts 5:11

The Spirit of God is the source of generous and liberal giving. It is a poor substitute to set up bazaars and fairs, and ice cream suppers. When the Church is filled with the Holy Spirit, her pockets will be easily emptied before His gracious, thawing presence. Let the sun arise in the heavens, and the frozen streams are instantly liberated and begin to sing on their way to transform wildernesses into gardens.

Mark the contrast between Ananias (Acts 5:1) and Barnabas (Acts 4:36). The sin of Ananias was not in keeping back part of the purchase money, but in pretending to have brought all to the apostle. He wished to pose as a saint, and at the same time to line his own nest. In the act of consecration, we must not allow one corner for Satan or selfishness to possess, because instantly we shall have to concede the right of way, and a thoroughfare will be opened along which all

manner of contraband may be smuggled in. Peter had no doubt as to the personality of the Holy Spirit. You cannot lie to an influence! Note the interchange of “Holy Ghost” and “God” in vv. 3 and 4.

(Through the Bible Day by Day, F. B. Meyer)

Peter knew of Satan’s subtlety because he had once been the devil’s agent when he suggested that the Lord avoid the cross (Matt. 16:23). Therefore, now having the Holy Spirit’s power within, he knew the lie and sin of Ananias immediately. “And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things” (Acts 5-11). Today God still hates religious hypocrisy, but it is indeed prevalent in the church. **In what ways has the church missed and ignored God’s warnings, and why?**

Hos. 4:6 Rev. 3:15-19

Acts 5:12-26

The angel of God comes to open prison doors. Are you in sore trouble, from which there is no apparent deliverance? Are you imprisoned in the dungeon of doubt and despair? Are you being heavily persecuted? Oh, wrap around you the divine protection! Dare to believe that the doors will open as by unseen hands. Nothing can stay the purposes of God.

(Through the Bible Day by Day, F. B. Meyer)

If you were trapped in a situation where there seemed to be no way out, what could you keep in mind to comfort you, to keep you from despairing, and to persevere in hope for deliverance? (Following are a few verses; add your own also.)

Ps. 34:6, 7, 17-19 Ps. 37:3-6, 18 Ps. 40:1-3 Isa. 41:10

Acts 5:27-42

Since they see that they cannot stop their mouths any other way than by stopping their breath, they *take counsel to slay them*, hoping that they shall *cause the work to cease*. While the apostles went on in the service of Christ, with a holy security and serenity of mind, perfectly composed, and in a sweet enjoyment of themselves, their persecutors went on in their opposition to Christ, with a constant perplexity and perturbation of mind, and vexation to themselves.

(Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible, Matthew Henry)

What does Acts 5:29 mean to you—“We ought to obey God rather than men”? What can prepare us for this strong stand if death is threatened? Who truly is the greater Authority?

Acts 6:1-15

The Grecians here mentioned were Jews who had lived abroad and spoke Greek. There were as yet no Gentiles in the Church. It was regarded as an annex to Judaism, and people had to become Jews before they were admitted to its privileges.

What a glimpse is here afforded of the simplicity and fervor of the primitive Church! The daily ministrations of relief; the choice of godly men to attend to secular details, the prime importance of prayer and the ministry of the Word; the recognition by the apostles of the rights of the people—all is so spiritual and so worthy of the era of the Holy Spirit. Alas, that so fair a dawn should ever have been overcast!

The Church must dedicate to God those whom she has chosen under the guidance of His Spirit. Stephen on the one hand, and Saul on the other, were the leaders of their respective parties. We see traces of the latter in the references to “them of Cilicia,” v. 9 (Saul was from Tarsus of Cilicia). Stephen’s enemies prevailed over him by brute force, but he was conqueror through the blood of the Lamb and the word of his testimony (Rev. 12:11, 12).

(Through the Bible Day by Day, F. B. Meyer)

What were the Scriptural reasons for the laying on of hands (Acts 6:6)? See how many of the nine reasons listed in the Bible you can name.

Gen. 48:14, 20 Ex. 29:10, 15, 19 Lev. 1:4 Lev. 4:14, 15 Num. 8:10, 11 Num. 27:18-23 Matt. 9:18 Matt. 19:13-15 Acts 6:6 Acts 13:2, 3 Acts 8:17, 18 1 Tim. 4:14

It was God’s time for a sharp division between the temple program and the new Church—and God had just the man for the job—the young Stephen who fearlessly preached with the power of the risen Christ. Deeply spiritual, he saw things in the

Old Testament relating to Christ, which even the apostles did not yet know. God needed a man to create a division between Judaism and the Church, and He used the mind and heart of Stephen to frame the last appeal to Israel as a nation, for them to consider Jesus as their Messiah, and to repent and receive new life in Him. In verses 9 and 10 a group from the Synagogue debated Stephen and were badly defeated by his wisdom given him by the Holy Spirit. **How did the defeated Jews of the Sanhedrin handle their wounded pride? How were their accusations against Stephen similar to those of Jesus' accusers?**

Luke 20:1, 2, 19-26 Acts 4:1, 13-21

Acts 7:1-60

Stephen, having finished his review of Israel's history, now makes his application. It is the last offer of the Kingdom to Israel:

Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.

Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain those who foretold the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers:

Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it (Acts 7:51-53).

This was too much for the enemies of Stephen, and

. . . they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth.

But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus *standing* on the right hand of God,

And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man *standing on the right hand of God* (Acts 7:54-56).

The critical moment has come. Once more the Lord through Stephen offers to set up the Kingdom, restore the nation and deliver Israel upon condition of repentance. They had rejected it when it was preached by John the Baptist and by the disciples of Jesus. They had rejected it when Peter made the offer at Pentecost, and now for the final time the offer is made. Stephen sees the Messiah of Israel *standing up in heaven*. When our Lord ascended into Heaven, He *sat down* at the right hand of God the Father (Heb. 1:3; Heb. 10:12). But here He is *standing up* before an opened door in heaven. The meaning should be clear. Their Messiah is ready to return, if Israel will repent at this invitation by Stephen. But instead, they reject the offer, the door in heaven is closed, and Jesus sits down again to await the time when, after the Church is gone, they will "look upon Him whom they had pierced" and be converted. God foreknew this rejection, in order that He might bring in, during the days of Israel's setting aside, the Church which is His Body.

(Pentecost and After, M. R. DeHaan)

Here Stephen was placed in a position to address the entire nation of Israel through its leaders. His words would be God's final invitation to Israel to repent and receive her Messiah. **Who would later be chosen by God to write epistles to the nation of Israel telling them of their blindness in rejecting Christ?**

Give a brief write-up from the following Scriptures how Israel followed their own righteousness of the law, and not the righteousness of faith:

Rom. 9:30-33 All of Rom. 10 Rom. 11:25-33 2 Cor. 4:3-6

In spite of Israel's rejection of Christ, will God's covenant with them remain, and has their restoration been established in Scripture?

Isa. 27:12 Isa. 54:10 Isa. 60:15, 16, 19-22 Jer. 16:14-21 Jer. 31:31-34 Jer. 33:1-8, 11, 16-17 Zech. 9:11, 12 Zech. 10:6 Zech. 12:10

Stephen's death now marks the conclusion of the *first part* of Jesus' commission to His disciples—the "beginning at Jerusalem." The *second part* of His commission will be accomplished by Philip's ministry in Judea and Samaria, in chapter 8. Before this second stage, however, we are introduced to a new personality whom God plans to use to carry out the *final part* of His commission—"and to the uttermost part of the earth." **Who is this man; was he present at the stoning of Stephen; what part did he play in it?**

Acts 8:1-4

This persecution was overruled to scatter the Church, which had grown too prosperous and secure, and needed to be reminded of the Lord's injunction to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. The light must be

diffused; the salt must be scattered. How often God has to drive us by trouble to do what we ought to have done gladly and spontaneously!

(Through the Bible Day by Day, F. B. Meyer)

Following Stephen's death, what happened to many who were followers of Jesus, and now also to the disciples? Did this help to promote God's great plan of bringing salvation to the whole world? And Saul at this point seems the most unlikely character to become God's instrument to use for His final thrust of "unto the uttermost part of the earth." Please write your comments regarding this.

Acts 9:1 Rom. 1:16 1 Tim. 1:15

Acts 8:5-25

Simon the Sorcerer had formally identified himself with Christianity by submitting to baptism, but he wasn't involved with the Spirit. When he saw the miracle accompanying the laying on of hands, he viewed it as a sorcery superior to his own, and he offered money to try to gain that power for *his* hands. Our modern word *simony* is derived from this man's actions—it has to do with exploiting sacred things to make money.

Judas sold the Lord for money, and now here is Simon trying to buy the Holy Spirit with money. This shows that Simon did not have the Spirit, else why would he try to buy Him? Those who have the Spirit know it (1 John 4:13). Peter may have been thinking of Judas when he perceived the evil of the magician's heart. He not only declared him an unsaved man, he told him that his money would perish with him since he thought the gift of God could be purchased with money. He was still trusting in magic, thus he remained in the bond of iniquity and poisoned by bitterness. Today many in our churches are in that same plight, but God is ready to save to the uttermost any who will seek His forgiveness.

(Lovett's Lights on Acts, C.S. Lovett-paraphrased)

During all of human history, the work of Satan is readily evident in his continuous attempt to destroy God's great plan of redemption for mankind. **Please make a statement or two summing up the lesson and the warning shown here.**

Deut. 18:10-12 Mal. 3:5 Rev. 9:21 Rev. 21:8

Acts 8:26-40

While sun worship was one of the religions of his land (Ethiopia), this man was somehow taught to worship the God of Israel. He was the man that God had marked out to receive the gospel, and therefore the Lord transported Philip to the road where this man's carriage would pass, and he hears him reading the Old Testament probably in Greek. (The Septuagint was a Greek translation of the Scriptures made in Alexandria, Egypt and was prepared for use by Jews throughout the region.)

Having just come from Jerusalem, he no doubt heard much about the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, as well as the wonders of Pentecost. Philip, being a Greek-speaking Jew, heard him reading aloud, and being compelled by the Holy Spirit, he came alongside the carriage and asked the man if he understood what he was reading. (The Holy Spirit evidently was guiding his reading for he was studying one of the most striking predictions of the Messiah's suffering in the O.T.—Isaiah 53.) Philip not only explained this passage fully, but proceeded to unfold the whole story of Christ. Since there were no N.T. Scriptures as yet, he couldn't have chosen a better place to begin. The nobleman's response tells us that Philip made it clear to him that Jesus had died for him personally.

(Lovett's Lights on Acts, C.S. Lovett-paraphrased)

Philip did lead the eunuch to the Lord and baptized him at his request and thus the gospel continued on to Ethiopia and beyond.

Fill in the following spaces:

Philip became known as an _____ (Acts 21:8) and preached throughout _____ (Acts 8:5).

Acts 9:1-6

Paul's conversion was in a supernatural manner—there was a light from heaven, and an audible voice speaking from heaven. It was accompanied by a physical shock which threw Paul to the ground (note that Scripture does not speak of his riding a horse as many pictures denote).

The appearance of Jesus to Paul was one of only three instances after Pentecost when Christ revealed Himself from heaven. The first one to see the ascended Lord was Stephen in Acts 7:56. Then, Saul saw and heard Him (Christ) in that

glory brighter than the noonday sun (1 Cor. 15:8). The last time the glorified Christ manifested Himself was to John on the island of Patmos (Rev. 19:11)

These three appearances after the ascension coincide with the three aspects of His Second Coming: First, He will appear to His waiting Church, represented by Stephen. Then He will appear to Israel, represented by the conversion of Saul. Thus the nation of Israel (typified by Saul) will “look upon Him whom they have pierced”—they will behold Him in the Tribulation and be saved. And then finally He will appear as John saw Him at Patmos, as the One who comes to judge the earth and set up His long-promised millennial Kingdom.

(Pentecost and After, M. R. DeHaan- paraphrased)

As you continue learning how meticulously and perfectly God restores to fellowship with Himself all who will come freely, state here in a few words how this is striking your heart and mind.

Acts 9:7-18

Here we see once again the three stages of Jesus’ proclamation in Acts 1:8, where He tells them that “ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”

The first stage of Jesus’ program ended with the stoning of Stephen (Jerusalem); the second stage is recorded in Chapter 8 where the gospel goes throughout Judaea and into Samaria, and the third and last stage begins with the conversion of Saul, in chapter 9, for he later becomes the apostle to the Gentiles—“the uttermost part of the earth”.

Paul (first called Saul) was not a criminal or a down-and-outer; rather he was a highly respected, cultured, law-abiding, religious man. He and Nicodemus are examples of two men, who were not from the gutter, so to speak, but who in their “upper class” lives, were truly blind as to who Jesus really was, and their deep need of Him.

(Pentecost and After, M. R. DeHaan- paraphrased)

Please make your comments on the sheer wonder of God’s plan and how perfect it is.

Acts 9:19-28

At this point, more than three years have passed since his conversion (Gal. 1:18), and his planned visit to Jerusalem will be his first visit to the apostles in Jerusalem. During his training under God in Arabia, he received special revelation concerning the Church, about which the apostles in Jerusalem as yet knew nothing; they were still expecting the setting up of the Kingdom. This new mystery truth was not too readily received by the apostles at first.

(Pentecost and After, M. R. DeHaan- paraphrased)

In reviewing all the details of Paul’s early life as a Christian, does this account give us a clearer understanding of some of God’s ways? Today we often hear astounding testimonies by someone who has just been saved out of a life of great sin and degradation. What dangers do you see in this—what is it that God needs and requires of us, before we are capable soul-winners? Other well-meaning Christians attempt to bring comfort and resolution to another’s trials, before they, themselves, are adequately equipped with the Word. Speak to this also.

Rom. 8:12-27 Rom. 8:31-38 Rom. 12:1, 2 Rom. 12:9-21 Cor. 3:18-23 1 Cor. 9:19-27 1 Cor. 11:27-34 1 Cor. 13:1-13 2 Cor. 4:7-15 2 Cor. 10:3-6

Acts 9:29-43

Here in Tarsus Paul spent some time waiting for the official opening of the door to the Gentiles by Peter, before embarking on his first missionary journey. In the meantime Peter is to make his final appearance on the scene. The balance of Acts 9, therefore, is an account of Peter’s ministry, while Paul is being prepared to take the spotlight in the rest of the book of Acts. Peter’s ministry to Jerusalem and Judaea and Samaria is first to be concluded. So while Paul is waiting in Tarsus, Peter travels to Lydda and heals a man by the name of Aeneas who had been paralyzed for eight years. From there he goes to Joppa on the seacoast. In the city of Joppa a certain disciple named Dorcas took sick and died. Knowing that Peter was in Lydda and probably having heard of the healing of Aeneas, they sent for Peter to come to Joppa, a distance of only about ten miles from Lydda. Here Peter raises Dorcas from the dead. Remember all this was still in Judaea. Peter had not yet gone beyond the confines of the second stage of Christ’s commission, “beginning at Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and Samaria.”

(Pentecost and After, M. R. DeHaan)

In thinking about this portion of Acts, choose one of the following three and write your statements about it, which could include some incident of this particular way of God operating in your life:

1) When we are earnest in our desire to serve the Lord, could His leading call us to minister to people whose cause seems hopeless?

2) What should our attitude be if we are seemingly busy about the Lord's work, and then we are turned suddenly away from that, and to something that might appear more challenging than we had expected?

3) Are we to be ready to hear God's voice in anything that comes into our lives—say a letter indicating that our plans have to be radically changed?—Or, say an employer or teacher who requires “over and above” from you some “extra” that you might feel is an encroachment upon you?

Acts 10:1-23

This chapter is devoted entirely to God's mysterious, yet always wondrous ways of accomplishing His purposes. At this point His way was to completely open up the full power of the Gospel by the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles (whom the Jews had long despised), and at the same time to fully persuade the Jewish people who loved the Lord, that this was His perfect will—that He would tear down the wall of separation and make of the two one body—His Church (Eph. 2:14-18).

Caesarea was the headquarters of the Roman governor of Palestine, since portions of the Roman army were garrisoned there. Cornelius was possibly a captain who belonged to a battalion made up of Italians, who were probably natives of Rome, and he was clearly a Gentile. No doubt he was drawn to the Jews' religion by the simplicity of worshiping one God and the Jews' high moral code. We are told that he was very religious and filled with good works, yet he was not saved (Acts 11:14).

Cornelius is deeply in prayer at the 3 o'clock Jewish hour of prayer when he has a vision of an angel coming to speak to him. Though he cries out in fear, the angel set him at ease, by telling him that God has taken note of all his good works and his giving unto God, and is pleased with him. Then God tells him to send men to Joppa to find Peter, and tells him exactly where he is staying and with whom. Peter is indeed the one whom he should talk with, for Peter is the head apostle and he is called by God to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles.

Now the scene changes to Peter who had taken lodging in the home of a man named Simon, a tanner who handled unclean animals. At this point in our story, Peter's ministry had been confined to Israelites and the half-breed Samaritans. Truly nothing could possibly be more repulsive to him than offering the Gospel to Gentiles, no matter how religious they were. To his mind, for a Gentile to be saved, he must first be circumcised, place himself under the Law, and become a Jew. As yet he knows nothing of how Christ's death destroyed the wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles, creating one body, the Church. It will indeed require divine intervention before Peter can bring God's answer to Cornelius' prayers—but when he does, the door will be opened to the Gentiles.

He certainly is not ready to welcome any Gentile messengers—and many of his scruples would have to be overcome before he could think of returning with them to Caesarea. As an orthodox Jew, Peter could not think of entering the house of a Gentile, even if he were a God-fearing man—but God is about to change all that! Peter went to the housetop for his midday devotions (he prayed three times a day), and while there he became hungry, and he sends word for some lunch to be brought him. (God never leaves any detail out when it is needed to convince a person!) While waiting, he falls into a trance, and in it sees a large sheet let down from the sky containing all kinds of unclean animals, reptiles and birds, and God speaks to him saying, “Rise, Peter, kill and eat!” Peter is repulsed! Such a thing is an offense to an orthodox Jew. It was a mixture of unclean, which were contaminated, and clean—but even these required a certain ritual before they could be killed. It would not be kosher!

What Peter had been told to do horribly violated his life style and Jewish conscience, and it actually was strictly forbidden by God's dietary laws of Leviticus 11. Peter has always recoiled when told to do something contrary to his nature. You will recall that when the Lord wanted to wash his feet, he said, “Never!” And also when the Lord said he would deny Him, he said, “Never!” He is surely baffled now, for how could the One whose Law forbade the eating of anything but kosher food turn around and order him to eat it? But note God's firm reply—“What God has cleansed, you must not call common.” And this whole scene was repeated three times!

If what Peter has just seen and heard is really true, it means God has cancelled the dietary laws. But has God contradicted Himself? No. What Peter doesn't understand is that God has *changed the program*. Many of the things He commanded of Israel as a *nation* (including dietary laws) were to keep them separated from the Gentiles. As long as Israel was the custodian of His revelation, He wanted that nation isolated from all others, and the levitical laws had served to accomplish this. But *now with the coming advent of the Church*, composed of *both* Jews and Gentiles, those former separating laws become obsolete. Peter is now meeting that truth. He will come to see that the meaning goes well

beyond articles of food. In fact, the animals being shown him represent people, and therefore clean and unclean men is now at an end.

God's timing is always perfect—at the very time Peter fully meditated on what he had seen, men were knocking at the gate, and Peter was being ordered to go with them. He is told that they, too, are divinely directed and therefore he should not hesitate. He is still puzzled, however, but his first clue will come when he learns the reason for the messengers' visit.

(Lovett's Lights on Acts, C.S. Lovett-paraphrased)

Fill in the following spaces:

Simon was a _____ by trade and he handled skins of unclean animals.

God had given Peter the _____ of the kingdom and he would be the instrument God would use in opening the _____ to the Gentiles.

Peter believed the _____ was not for the Gentiles but was limited to the house of _____.

If any Gentile desired to be saved, he must become a _____, submit himself to _____, and place himself under the _____ of Moses.

To Peter, the Gentile was an unclean _____.

Peter was yet to learn that the _____ wall of partition between _____ and _____ had been broken down, and that in _____ there is neither Jew nor Gentile, _____ or free.

Acts 10:24-43

Our Scripture indicates that Cornelius was indeed eager to meet Peter and that he prostrated himself before him—this act was somewhat natural due to the Roman practice of regarding certain men as gods, an example being Caesar. For Peter to say that he was just a man was quite a meaningful statement for in so doing he had to sweep aside 1400 years of tremendous difference—but Peter was getting the message of the lowered sheet! And he made it clear that God was the one to show him that no man was to be considered unclean or defiled, for prior to this, his prejudice against Gentiles had been great indeed. Peter as the top apostle, holding the keys to the kingdom, needed to fully understand that the Gentiles are acceptable to God, before using this final key in reaching out to them.

Cornelius and the people he had with him were more than prepared to hear Peter's message; the soil had already been prepared, for they already believed there was but ONE God. Their minds were unbiased, free of prejudice, and wide open to all that God has for them. They had not come to pass judgment, but to act upon what they would hear.

Prior to the revelation of the lowered sheet, Peter had always believed that God was partial—that Israel was His favorite race. In saying that God has no favorites, Peter sweeps away 20 centuries of Jewish prejudice. Next to the incarnation of Christ, the day of Pentecost, and the conversion of Saul, stand these words of Peter to the Gentile world. This is an epoch in human history! And it is remarkable that Peter is only now coming into this truth, for it is as old as Moses (Deut 10:17). Peter knew this truth in theory, but it took the crisis of Cornelius to make it real to him.

(Lovett's Lights on Acts, C.S. Lovett-paraphrased)

Besides the following Scripture verses, list any others that you can find that bear out the truth that the Gospel is intended by God for every race and every gender:

John 3:16 Rom. 5:8 Eph. 2:4-6 Eph. 2:11-18

Acts 10:44-48

The Holy Spirit fell upon the audience, as on the day of Pentecost, v. 44. There must have been that wonderful stirring and moving among the people which we have beheld, in a modified form, in modern audiences when moved by the celestial wind, as a harvest field by the breeze. Peter never finished his sermon. It seemed as if the Holy Spirit put the apostle aside, saying, "You have spoken enough; leave the rest to Me!"

(Through the Bible Day by Day, F. B. Meyer)

How does Philippians 1:6 fit in with this message?

Acts 11:1-18

To the circumcised, law-keeping Jews at Jerusalem, Peter's actions appeared to be "treason." Peter had clearly violated strict Jewish rules. It had the effect of tearing down the wall between Jew and Gentile—a separation they believed to be established by divine law. Seemingly he had brushed aside all Jewish procedure. They cared more that

Jewish rules were violated than having the precious Word go to lost souls, and they feared that if a tide of “heathen” should sweep into the church, it would lose all of its Jewishness—what an alarming prospect!

Rather than denouncing their narrowminded prizing of rules more than people, Peter calmly and generously did his best to justify his actions and conciliate his brethren, by pointing out the amazing supernatural elements in the story regarding Cornelius and his friends. His listeners will only be convinced if they believe his actions were ordered by God—and the six Jewish witnesses who had accompanied Peter to Caesarea, were present to confirm his story.

Peter’s defense was not based on what he did, but only on what God did—and the climax of his argument is that God truly baptized these new Gentiles in the Holy Spirit. In fact, this happened before Peter had finished his teaching to them. And here Peter rests his case. The events, as they unfolded, clearly showed it was God’s will for these Gentiles to be saved, and since he proved it was God’s doing, his argument was irresistible.

(Lovett’s Lights on Acts, C.S. Lovett-paraphrased)

Do you think that Peter’s accounting of these Gentiles being saved might have taken these Jewish believers back to their own dramatic receiving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2:36-39)? Did they grasp that the same Holy Spirit, with the same power and undeniable manifestations, had truly come upon the Gentiles, as well as upon them? Will they release their strong rulings regarding circumcision and the keeping of the Law?

Acts 11:19-30

There in Jerusalem the “grumbling” was silenced for the moment, but 1400 years of national prejudice cannot be turned off like a faucet. It had taken a “Damascus Road” type experience to change Peter’s mind, and the rest of the church will die hard. Later on, a new “Circumcision party” will try to block Paul’s work when he begins preaching to the Gentiles. In theory, the church is now acknowledging the Gospel is for the whole world, but the disciples will be in no hurry to put that theory into practice. This was a great fault in the Jerusalem church.

Now Luke flashes back in his story to take up the account of what happened to those who fled Jerusalem (Acts 8:4). He had interrupted himself to tell of Saul’s conversion, Philip’s ministry to the Samaritans, and the Cornelius affair. In telling the story of those who fled northward, he is eager to show how they were used to create the great Gentile church at Antioch. Among these would be Nicolas (the seventh deacon, Acts 6:5) for he was a “proselyte from Antioch.” They were still witnessing to Jews only, and some time would pass before they minister to the Gentiles.

With the passing of time, a different breed of Hellenist Greek arrived in Antioch from Cyprus and Cyrene. They were used to freedom and were not nearly so strict in their Judaism as the Hellenists who were scattered earlier. Their more daring spirits, plus the freedom of Antioch, prompted them to try a bold step—sharing Christ with the Greeks of that city. Evidently some of them were God-fearers (perhaps seekers) and it seemed only natural to tell them about Jesus. Thus the city of Antioch was ripe for the Gospel, and the rules of the Jerusalem church seemed far away. These Greeks happily received the word of Christ.

The leaders of the Jerusalem church, upon hearing of these happenings, sent a delegation headed by Barnabas, to check out this startling development. They couldn’t have picked a better man, because Barnabas himself was a Hellenist from Cyprus, and he would be more sympathetic than any of the Christian Jews who had never been outside of Judea. He was overjoyed upon arrival and helped by teaching. In this teaching he urged the people to cling to the person of Jesus rather than the teachings about Him.

Then, rather than return to Jerusalem with his report, he sought for Saul in Tarsus, for he had seen him risk his life for Christ while preaching to Greek-speaking Jews in Jerusalem. And at last Saul stepped out onto the stage where his particular talents would be well used. And here in Antioch the believers were first called “Christians” by the pagan Romans—it was their way of describing those who were always talking about Christ. In Greek, the name means “Christ-people.”

(Lovett’s Lights on Acts, C.S. Lovett-paraphrased)

“Christian” is a transliteration of the Greek *christianos*, which was a simple name given to the early followers of Christ. Greek “christos” is not unlike a believer today being called a “Jesus-person.” Do you feel this was meant to be complimentary (in most cases), or derisive?

Acts 12:1-19

This Herod is Herod Agrippa 1, the grandson of Herod the Great who had the baby boys killed after Jesus was born. He was a half-Jew, raised in Rome, and a favorite of the Roman court. He was given the title of king in A.D. 37 and ruled over parts of southern Syria. More territories were added to his kingdom, so that by A.D. 41 he ruled over all of Palestine,

including Judea. In order to gain favor, he pretended that he observed the Jewish customs, and to please the Pharisees he had James (John's brother) executed.

You will recall that a number of the apostles at Jerusalem favored strict Jewishness, but now Peter has met with Cornelius, which marked the beginning of the church embracing Gentiles. This, of course, caused the displeasure of many of the Jews, and when Herod detected this, he ordered Peter to be seized in order to boost his own prestige. He could not execute him, however, until the Passover was ended, and he planned to do it publicly.

Peter was under heavy guard watch since he had been delivered from prison before (Acts 5:17-20), but the people of the church immediately went to fervent prayer, and God indeed answered their prayers. An angel awoke him, snapped his chains silently so as not to wake the guards, and led him out to the street. Soon Peter realized that God had truly intervened on his behalf. Knowing that he soon would be followed, he went to the house of Mary, Mark's mother, where Christians were praying for him. Following their utter amazement, Peter asked them to get word to James, Jesus' brother, who now was head of the church. He then no doubt headed north toward Antioch where he would be free of Herod's jurisdiction.

Finally, Herod was so embarrassed that he could not carry out his promises to the Jews, that he left Jerusalem and returned to his palace at Caesarea. There he decided to hold a great festival in honor of the emperor, in order to save face.

(Lovett's Lights on Acts, C.S. Lovett-paraphrased)

From your knowledge of mighty deliverances that God has performed in the Bible, on what type of occasions does God use these, employing angelic and the supernatural? Give an example from the Bible of each type.

Acts 12:20-25

The Phoenician cities of Tyre and Sidon had depended on Galilee for food for many years. The people of these cities had also offended Herod in some way unknown to us, so at this time they sent a delegation to him in order to make peace, and the king then consented to hear them on the same day on which he planned to honor Caesar. From the writings of Josephus the historian, we learn that Herod made his appearance to them decked out in dazzling royal finery, which aided in the people suddenly shouting that "This is a god speaking and not just a man!" Herod, being a half-Jew, should have remembered that this was blasphemy, and turned away from it—but his vanity took over, and he allowed them to think of him as divine.

Since glory belongs only unto God, Herod was immediately smitten with a terrible disease, causing him to suffer severe pain in his abdomen. Josephus tells us that he died five days later at the age of 54, in the seventh year of his reign. Luke reports his symptoms which describe a ruptured cyst or peritonitis, which corresponds to being worm eaten.

(Lovett's Lights on Acts, C.S. Lovett-paraphrased)

Here recall verse 1 of chapter 12, where Herod the king "stretched out his hand to harass some from the church." Listed below are Bible verses depicting God's divine protection. For each verse, name the characteristic of His divine protection as shown in that verse. For example, Psalm 121:3-8 shows his *continuous* protection.

Joshua 1:5 _____ Isaiah 41:10 _____ John 10:28-30 _____ 2 Corinthians
12:9, 10 _____ Psalm 121:1 _____

Acts 13:1-12

This is one of the greatest chapters in the New Testament, making a new departure in the ministry of the Gospel, which henceforth begins to pass out to the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:8). It is likely that the mother church at Jerusalem was too conservative to lend herself to the pressure of the Holy Spirit, urging worldwide evangelization, and that He had to employ the more mobile church at Antioch, which was more susceptible to the passion for humanity since it stood on the edge of the great heathen world, like a lighthouse on the shore of a desolate sea.

(Through the Bible Day by Day, F. B. Meyer)

The Lord had earlier directed that Saul would be the bearer of His name among the Gentiles. Twelve years have passed since Paul was commissioned by the Lord, and now the Holy Spirit orders that he and Barnabas be set apart for the work to which He had called them. They took along John Mark who would tend to their various needs, and set sail for Cyprus, an island 60 miles out to sea. At this time Cyprus was a Roman province managed by a proconsul. Barnabas had also come from Cyprus so knew the area and people well. They preached in every Jewish synagogue first of all, and this was acceptable for Paul was a rabbi.

In the capitol of Paphos the Roman governor (proconsul), named Sergius Paulus was eager to learn what these men taught. Paul well knew God's teaching about the evils of sorcery (see Lev. 20:27), and also, being filled with the Holy Spirit, he condemned this sorcerer and caused blindness to fall upon him.

(Lovett's Lights on Acts, C.S. Lovett-paraphrased)

Please fill in the following blanks: In this passage of Scripture, Saul is now called by the name of _____ which was his Roman (Gentile) name. Barnabas was an excellent "junior" partner of Paul, and he was greatly used in encouraging Paul. This man, Elymas, who blinded others to the truth, now became _____ himself. When Sergius Paulus heard and saw this amazing happening, he became a _____. In this battle against Satan, Paul could not have done this except he was in partnership with the _____.

Acts 13:13-25

They always traveled to the Jewish synagogues when they arrived—"to the Jew first"—and since Paul was a visiting rabbi, they received many welcomes. The practice on the Sabbath in the synagogue was the reading first from the Torah (first five books of Moses), followed by a portion from one of the Prophets that gave understanding to the passage from the Law. Paul was invited to speak, and here we have his first recorded sermon, which was addressed to the Jews. (Later on, Luke does give us parts of Paul's messages to Christians and pagans.)

(Lovett's Lights on Acts, C.S. Lovett-paraphrased)

This was a typical Acts sermon including 1) a review of Jewish history; 2) a sketch of the life of Christ with an emphasis on the resurrection; 3) Old Testament texts to prove that Jesus is the Messiah; 4) a call to hear the message, repent and believe.

(NKJ New Spirit Filled Life Bible, footnote for Acts13:17-41)

By studying this first missionary journey, it is quite evident that Paul and Barnabas were being explicitly led by the Holy Spirit regarding how to preach the Gospel, where they should go, and to whom. Perhaps some of you have gone on missionary trips, or will be going. **Please comment on how the direction and planning should come about. Also, are there serious dangers of mishandling these plans? What are the absolute requisites?**

Acts 13:26-37

For Paul the resurrection was always the keystone of faith. He had taken particular care to assure himself of the reality of that foundation fact. In 1 Cor. 15 he sets forth at length the testimony culminating in his own experience, on which he rested his belief. He had been allowed to see that blessed One and hear the word from His mouth. He quotes Ps. 2:7, Isa. 55:3, and Ps. 16:10. He makes unexpected use of the first of these quotations, teaching that it was fulfilled in the resurrection. This sheds new light on death. It is not death but birth, not an ending but a beginning. Our Lord was the firstborn from the dead. We say that a saint has died; angels say that he has been born.

Notice that great word about David, v. 36. He served God's counsel, or purpose, in his own generation. That should be the supreme objective of our lives. Not to succeed, or to make money, or to please ourselves, but to serve the will of God who sent us forth.

(Through the Bible Day by Day, F. B. Meyer)

David could serve God in the way God desired because his heart was right before Him. He was "a man after My own heart, who shall fulfill all My will" (Acts 13:22). **Spiritually speaking, how can we define the heart? And what is required for us to nurture a good heart before our Lord?**

1 Sam. 1:13 Ps. 51:7 Ps. 73:1 Ps. 112:7, 8 Ps. 101:2 Prov. 10:8 Matt. 5:8 Matt. 12:35
Acts 2:46 2 Cor. 4:6

Acts 13:38-41

The doctrine of justification by faith, so closely associated with the work of Paul, is here stated for the first time. In Jesus there is forgiveness. For those who trust in Him, past sins are absolutely put away, never to be named again, never to be brought up at any future judgment day. Our record is as clear as the sand which has been swept smooth by the ocean waves. We are not only forgiven, but justified. We are treated as though we had never sinned, and "are

justified from all things.” It is a present fact. You may not feel justified or forgiven, but if you are trusting in Jesus, you are at this moment as certainly and as fully justified as have been the saints in heaven.

(Through the Bible Day by Day, F. B. Meyer)

The doctrine of justification in a nutshell is “accounting the guilty as just before God.” **Please fill in the blanks below:**
Man can never be made just by the _____ (Rom. 3:20, 28). Nor by _____ (Rom. 10:1-4). Nor by _____ (Rom. 4:1-5) However, man can be made just by the following: _____ (Rom. 5:17-21) _____ (Rom. 5:9) _____ (Rom. 10:3)

Acts 13:42-52

The people to whom Paul and Barnabas were ministering had never heard such handling of the Scriptures before, and they begged them to come again the next Sabbath to help them understand more clearly. This was proof that the grace of God was working deeply in their hearts.

Although many Jews welcomed this new presentation of the Gospel, the larger number of them displayed jealousy that it was being offered to the Gentiles on an equal basis with the Jews. They could not accept that Paul by-passed the Jewish requirements, preaching that all that mattered was faith in Christ. Their anger went so far as to curse him. Paul and Barnabas were careful to honor “to the Jew first”—but if they did not receive it, then it was to be offered to all those who did want it. This action then became standard procedure throughout all of Paul’s journeys—in each new town they went first to the synagogues, but when these Jews as a body would reject the message, he then preached to the Gentiles in that city. The words of Isaiah 49:6 were being fulfilled.

Although the Jews of this Psidian Antioch resented the idea of unrestricted salvation for Gentiles, the Gentiles themselves were thrilled and delighted. For now they had become free of the synagogue and every Jewish requirement. And as a result many of them departed from organized Judaism to form Gentile churches of their own. This truly set them free from the burdens of legalism. These new disciples of Christ found the true joy of the Holy Spirit in their midst, and continued on in their growing and learning in the Lord, in spite of the Jewish resentment around them.

(Lovett’s Lights on Acts, C.S. Lovett-paraphrased)

Verse 48 tells us that “as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.” **Can you see in this God’s own initiative in individual salvation?** Throughout the Bible we see God influencing people and altering the course of human history. **Can you also recognize God orchestrating particular events that have changed yours or others lives forever? Please address this briefly.**

Prov. 16:9 Dan. 4:34, 35 Acts 2:22-24 Eph. 1:3-5

Acts 14:1-7

Although they experienced opposition almost everywhere they went, Paul and Barnabas refused to be discouraged—rather they kept going deeper into Gentile territory. They traveled eastward from Antioch at this time, 90 miles along the Roman military highway to Iconium, which today is called Konya. They encountered there many Greeks, a few Roman soldiers, and an old Jewish colony. As was his custom, Paul went to their synagogue first. Here again, God richly blessed them by causing a large number of both Jews and Gentiles to turn to the Lord.

The unbelieving Jews once again circulated false reports about Paul and Barnabas and also the new converts, but Paul’s message was that of the Holy Spirit, and their work progressed well.

(Lovett’s Lights on Acts, C.S. Lovett-paraphrased)

These men of God, in the face of continual persecution, lies, cruelty and even stoning, were faithful. Faith itself is known as the confidence in the testimony of another, and one’s faithfulness is making faith a living reality in one’s life. **Faithfulness can be manifested in many ways, some of which are listed here with the Bible references. After reading these and the references, please write a few sentences regarding the status of your own faithfulness. Faithfulness is manifested in: God’s service (Matt. 24:45); in declaring God’s Word (Jer. 23:28); in bearing witness (Prov. 14:5); in keeping secrets (Prov. 11:13); in helping others (3 John 5); in holding offices of trust (Neh. 13:13); in reproving others (Prov. 27:6); in conveying messages (Prov. 25:13); and in the smallest things (Luke 16:10-12).**

Acts 14:8-20

In Lystra there was no Jewish synagogue because there was no Jewish population, so their preaching had to be done on the streets. Here, however, God allowed Paul to perform a miracle of healing on a man lame from birth, and this indeed drew the crowds he needed for preaching. But this caused another kind of crisis—these pagan people envisioned Paul and Barnabas as gods from heaven, for such was their type of belief. In their thinking, because he had brought healing to the cripple, Paul was considered to be Hermes, the spokesman for the gods. Barnabas was Zeus, the mightiest of all the ancient gods, and the father of other gods and men. The people rushed to prepare sacrifices of food, for they hoped the visit of these “gods” meant that they would put an end to all their problems. Paul and Barnabas immediately tore their clothes which was a Jewish gesture of horror at an act of blasphemy—and possibly they thought of the fate of King Herod. Paul and Barnabas would have none of this “worship” which reminds us of Satan’s offer of fame and power to Jesus if He would bow down and worship him. They quickly denied any deity, telling their hearers that they, too, suffered and would die like all men.

When Paul had preached to the Jews, they understood and worshiped the one true God, and he could also speak of the promised Christ, or Messiah. However, the people in Lystra knew nothing of the God of the Bible, so Paul first had to open the Bible of nature and declare its Creator. They were amazed to have him tell them that there was only one God who made heaven, earth, and sea, for they had a god for each realm. Paul later teaches in Romans that this God has provided a completely sufficient testimony in nature so as to leave them without excuse (Rom. 1:22).

Immediately following this, Jews came from other areas and by some means captured the attention of the crowds, and turned them against Paul, so that they stoned him, dragging him outside of the city, and left him there as dead. Later, in 2 Cor. 11:25, Paul writes, “Once I was stoned,” and this is the occasion he is thinking of. Yet God, again in His faithfulness, raised him up, and he and Barnabas departed to Derbe.

(Lovett’s Lights on Acts, C.S. Lovett-paraphrased)

We only fail in trying to imagine Paul’s suffering on this occasion—yet God always has a way of bringing good out of trials when they are committed to Him. From Acts 16:1, 2, we see that Paul gained his “son in the faith” in Timothy, who loved him and became devoted to him, and followed him in preaching the Gospel. No doubt Paul’s suffering for God’s righteous cause turned his heart toward Paul. We do not fear stoning today, but we can be misunderstood, shunned, mocked and have false accusations made against us. **What strong Bible verses can be our pillar of strength at such a time?**

Acts 14:21-28

At Derbe, Paul and Barnabas preached and taught the gospel to many with great success and were not molested. They then returned to Lystra where Paul had been stoned. However, new magistrates were ruling who were not hostile to these missionaries. They visited the churches and endeavored to strengthen them by appointing elders—these included all church officers. Paul greatly encouraged the believers but warned them of the tribulations that they should expect as Christians. The New Testament teaches that suffering is the norm for God’s people, but it is the pathway to glory (Rom. 8:16, 17; 2 Thess. 1:4; 2 Tim. 2:12). Missionary endeavor has always included sacrifice and death. It has been said, “When we cease to bleed, we cease to bless.”

Following this, they retraced their steps, visiting the churches, and returned to Antioch, thus completing the first missionary journey. The apostles had covered more than 1400 miles and were gone for more than two years or longer (A.D. 45-48).

(Lovett’s Lights on Acts, C.S. Lovett-paraphrased)

Please sum up in a few sentences your critique of this first missionary journey. Would you say that God’s purposes had been accomplished?

Acts 15:1-18

When the news of Paul’s report—that Gentiles were being saved by simply believing—plus nothing—reached Jerusalem, a group of legalistic teachers hurried down to Antioch and began to teach the believers there that Paul was wrong. Barnabas and Paul on the one hand were defending the grace of God, while these legalistic Judaizers from Jerusalem insisted upon circumcision and the keeping of the Law. That there was a real church fight is quite evident from verse 2. This was to be the first ecumenical council in church history, and Paul and Barnabas were delegates from Antioch.

Here we insert a bit of material which Paul revealed in his epistle to the Galatians (this, of course, was not yet written at the time of this meeting). It seems that Peter had heard the glowing report of Paul and Barnabas, and personally had gone down to Antioch to get firsthand information. Paul and Barnabas were back from their first missionary trip and Peter pays them a visit. When Peter, an orthodox Jew, saw the evidence of the grace of God among these Gentile Christians,

he cast off all his legal restraints, recognized the genuineness of Paul's message of grace, and entered fully and completely into fellowship with these Gentile believers. He ate with them, visited and fellowshiped with them as though there had never been any ancient or legal prejudices to separate them. He rejoiced with them in the liberty of grace.

However, when the legalistic sabbatarian teachers from Jerusalem came to Antioch, Peter withdrew himself from the group, because he was afraid of the criticism of these legalistic, Judaistic law-teachers. This so incensed Paul that he publicly rebukes and dresses Peter down for his inconsistent conduct. Paul tells this in his own words in Galatians 2:11-14. This silenced Peter and we hear no more from him until they meet for the general council in Jerusalem.

Paul and Barnabas with others made plans to go to Jerusalem to have these issues settled once for all. True to their calling, they preached in churches along the way.

Peter speaks first, and makes a moving point by saying they had no right to add circumcision and rabbinical traditions, when God Himself had required none—His way was to save and by grace alone! Peter also adds that not one of them, nor their fathers, could keep the law (the law only condemned them), and therefore it could not be the means of salvation for the Gentiles. Jesus had said when He walked among them, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of Me," and He was contrasting His loving way of grace to the harshness of the Law.

Barnabas and Paul spoke, telling of the miracles and wonders that God had performed among the Gentiles by them.

This new program was hard to accept, but in receiving it, there was still an all-important question unanswered. If God is now building the Church, then what about all the promises of the kingdom of David—would these be applied to the Church instead? If the Church is the new Kingdom, then the requirements of the Kingdom must be met, and the Gentiles must be circumcised and brought under the law of the Kingdom. After a long significant silence, God gives the answer to this question. James, the brother of Jesus, and the head of this meeting gives his answer in vv. 13-18, and he quotes from Amos 9:11, 12. Here the Holy Spirit once and for all settles the question of the reason for the Church Age intervening between the First and Second Coming of Christ; and establishes the certainty of the setting up of the Messianic Kingdom at the return of the Messiah.

In v. 16 of our text, James says of Christ, "After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down ..."

(Pentecost and After, M. R. DeHaan-parphrased)

Notice the words after this I will return to set up the Kingdom. And we ask, after what? And the answer is after God has taken out from among the Gentiles a people for His Name, which is the program of God. When Jesus came the first time to offer the Kingdom to Israel it was rejected, the nation was set aside, and God revealed a new thing—the Church, the Body of Christ which would fill the interim between our Lord's rejection and His coming to set up the Throne of David. And this is what He is doing today, "calling out" the Church, the Bride of the King, and then after that He will return and fulfill all the Kingdom promises. To the question, Has the Lord forgotten Israel? Is the Church the Kingdom?—to this James says no! When the last member is added to the Body of Christ the Lord will return, restore Israel, and bring in the glorious millennial age of peace.

(Pentecost and After, M. R. DeHaan)

The above section is not only historical; it gives us the great purposes of God for all mankind in a nutshell. **Here we ask you to do one of two things: 1) If you feel you understand fairly well the program of God as set forth above, write it in your own words in one paragraph. 2) If you do not feel you have grasped this, then jot down your questions concerning it, for further teaching.**

Acts 15:19-41

Since none of the N. T. had been written as yet, the assembled apostles and elders wrote what is known as the Jerusalem Decree, setting forth the results of the council meeting, and laying down a few restrictions in v. 29. This would help to allay some of the differences between the freedom the Gentiles enjoyed and the stricter codes by which the Jews were regulated.

Judas and Silas, now prophets, accompanied Paul and Barnabas to Antioch, carrying this letter, which brought great rejoicing and encouragement to the people there.

Now Paul proposes a second missionary tour with Barnabas. However, a dispute arose between the two of them over John Mark, the deserter who had left them on the first trip, and this caused a separation between them. Paul now takes Silas and starts on his second tour. From here (Acts 16 to 28), we have an account of Paul's second and third missionary journeys, and his final trip as a prisoner to Rome. The book closes with Paul in jail (Acts 28:31).

(Pentecost and After, M. R. DeHaan- parphrased)

We have read of Peter's humanity earlier in Acts, which caused him to fear the strict Jews enough that he turned away from the Gentiles—and now we see Paul and Barnabas differing so much that it caused them to part from each other.

Was Paul correct in his attitude or not—can you give Scripture to back your claim?

Matt. 5:9 Matt. 5:43-45 Matt. 6:14, 15 Matt. 7:1-5

Acts 16:1-5

Paul had a wonderful influence over young men. Timothy, Titus and Mark bore his impress. When circumcision was insisted upon, as in the previous chapter, no one opposed it more stoutly than Paul; when it conciliated Jewish prejudice, he was quite willing to concede it, since in itself it was a matter of perfect indifference. As the stoning of Stephen was the first step toward winning Paul, so his own stoning at Lystra on the former occasion, as we have noted, probably gave him Timothy.

(Through the Bible Day by Day, F. B. Meyer)

We know that later on Paul writes the books of 1 and 2 Timothy to his "son in the faith." Timothy is well taught by Paul and becomes his disciple. Later on following Paul's first Roman imprisonment, he left Timothy in charge of the church in Ephesus. **Tell us in your own words how Paul describes himself to Timothy in 1 Tim. 1:12-16. Do you feel that his many experiences as a preacher of the Gospel had mellowed him a great deal by this time?**

Acts 16:6-10

Our path through life will often be indicated by the fact that the doors which lead off the straight track are barred and bolted, so that we have no option save to go on. Paul was blocked first on the left, that he should not go into the province of Asia; then on the right, that he should not go into Bithynia. Finally he reached Troas, and stood face to face with the ocean that lay between him and Europe.

Here he had a vision which made a deep impression upon him. He saw a man of Macedonia standing in an attitude of entreaty and saying, "Come over into Macedonia, and help us."

(Through the Bible Day by Day, F. B. Meyer)

Luke indicates somewhat how the Holy Spirit communicated His will to these missionaries. It could have been through prompting, prophetic utterance or outward circumstances (which we often denote as the opening or closing of doors). For our information, Macedonia is northern Greece, including the cities of Philippi and Thessalonica, to which later Paul addressed three of his epistles. **Can you give an example in your own life of how you believe you were led by the Holy Spirit in a certain situation?**

Acts 16:11-34

Keeping his custom of preaching on the Sabbath and in the synagogues, Paul traveled to Philippi, one of the four districts of Macedonia to begin his ministry there, but he found no synagogue. It appeared that there were not enough male Jews in this Roman colony to have a synagogue, for Jewish custom required a minimum of 10 men to form a congregation for the reading of the Torah. However, outside the city was a place of prayer where Jewish women and God-fearing Gentiles gathered to carry out the Jewish prayer service.

Our Scripture tells us that "the Lord moved on her heart" and Lydia, a merchant-lady, possibly a widow, responded to Paul's message. It is always thus—the Lord touches people's hearts, not merely the words of His servants, and this is the way in which He builds His church. Lydia perhaps became the first European convert, and years later Paul will send a letter to the church at Philippi. It is remarkable to see how the Gospel honors women, and it reassures us that each and every one on earth is "special" to Him!

In the Greek text Luke indicates that the slave girl was considered as a voice (or oracle) of Apollo, the god of divination. The people of Philippi believed that she was inspired by Apollo and they would pay large sums to have her tell their fortunes. Demons are able to reveal some kinds of information, and her shrewd masters played upon the credulity of the people. The spirit within her truthfully identified Paul and his companions (Mk. 1:24; Luke 4:41) Her disturbing crying out and Paul's knowledge of this Satanic demon finally caused him to confront that demon, and he did so *in the name of Jesus*, casting it out. This kind of power comes only from the Lord Himself! Immediately, her behavior was peaceful. We are not told that she became a Christian (which was certainly likely), but if so, she perhaps became the second convert in Europe—also another woman. Now, however, these wicked masters knew that their well-paying business was gone, and they manage to have Paul and Silas arrested and charged—not for destroying their profits—but for disturbing the peace

with illegal Jewish religious activities. At this time in Philippi the Jews were in special disgrace, having been banished from Rome. They were also forbidden by strict Roman law (this was a Roman colony) to propagate their religion among Romans. In their company Luke, being a Gentile, and Timothy, a half-Jew, were not arrested.

One might wonder at this point, where is that call through the Spirit of the Macedonian man? Here Paul and Silas were considered as wandering Jews doing serious damage to two Roman citizens! Following the whippings they were thrown into the inner prison which was probably underground, dark and unventilated, with their feet secured in stocks.

Our Scripture teaches us that Paul and Silas, in spite of their pain and bleeding, had hearts to do only as God would have them do—pray and sing praises to God—and at midnight! God responded with an earthquake that cancelled the work of the devil, and they were set free.

The jailer, knowing the discipline of the Roman army, fearfully decided to take his life at this point, but Paul's shouting to him stopped him in time, and after leading them out, he begged of them to know how he could be saved. He would be the third person in Philippi reached by the power of Christ!

(Lovett's Lights on Acts, C.S. Lovett-paraphrased)

When considering the completeness of this amazing story of God's supernatural deliverance upon the faith of the missionaries, and then the unbelievable turn-about from darkness to light of the Roman jailer, we must then ask ourselves the questions: If we too were faced with serious trial, would our faith be equal to the test, and would we believe for God's deliverance and for His salvation of those involved? Here, write as you feel led regarding this question, or choose Scriptures that pertain to such a situation.

2 Cor. 5:7 Heb. 11:24-26 Isa. 41:10 Ps. 34:6 Ps. 37:5, 6, 17

Acts 16:35-40

The magistrates offer them release the next day, but Paul insists that they come to escort them out, since they are Roman citizens themselves. This makes their trial and imprisonment illegal, so the magistrates go to the prison, apologize and beg them to leave town. It is difficult to understand why Paul insists on his civil rights, for these are not the criteria to stand upon as servants of Christ.

They do not leave Philippi, but go to Lydia's home which has become the meeting place for the church. Perhaps the jailer and his household participated with them there. Then Paul and Silas leave Philippi taking Timothy with them. Luke does not accompany them.

(Lovett's Lights on Acts, C.S. Lovett-paraphrased)

This lesson gives us a great deal to learn about leaning on God for His strength, wisdom and guidance. In today's society, most people lean on their own judgment due in great part to much knowledge being advanced and available, and it is difficult for individuals to realize the foolishness of human reasoning. **Below are some verses regarding this—please add yours.**

Rom. 8:14 Rom. 14:7-12 Rom. 15:3 1 Cor. 1:26-29 1 Cor. 2:5, 11, 14-16

Acts 17:1-9

Paul's group passed through two cities, where there was no synagogue and came to Thessalonica, the largest city in Macedonia, where there were many Jews. It was a wealthy, heavily populated center of commerce. He preached Christ for three Sabbaths in this important synagogue. He endeavored to teach them from the O.T. proving that Jesus was the Messiah. The thrust of his message was that the Scriptures foretold the sufferings and resurrection of the Messiah, and that Jesus was the only One who fulfilled these requirements. Some Jews believed, but most of his converts were God-fearing Gentiles. Also, a large number of leading women came to Christ.

The majority of the Jews would not believe their message and became envious of Paul's success with the Greeks. These Jews rounded up some "undesirables" to spread vicious and untrue talk about the missionaries throughout the city. Eventually an ugly mob descended on the house of Jason—he was one whom Paul and Silas had converted and who hosted them. Jason's Hebrew name was Joshua or Jesus, but for some reason he used his Greek name. Jason and other believers there were charged with keeping political and religious agitators in his home, and they were also accused of introducing a king to rival the claim of Caesar!

Yes, Jesus was a king, but not One who sought Caesar's throne—He had one of His own. This very partial truth caused serious charges to be brought.

Jason and his friends were brought before the magistrates. Paul realizes the need to leave, for staying longer could jeopardize the new church, and possibly bring hardship upon new believers. Later, we learn that this church became an "on-fire" center for Christ (1 Thess. 1:6-10).

It is easily recognized that the more penetrating and exhaustive the work of these missionaries, the more evidence there is of Satan's opposition through unbelievers. **Can you name a more recent missionary who seemingly started out well, and then progressively met more and more opposition and persecution? If you have the call of God upon you to give the Gospel to the lost in other places, what Holy Spirit preparation is imperative for you to have?**

Acts 17:10-15

Scripture tells us that the brethren hurriedly sent Paul and Silas to Berea, where they again go to the Jewish synagogue. Quite a surprise awaited them here for these Berean Jews were open-minded and welcomed new ideas. They eagerly listened to the message, and then checked the Scriptures to make sure that their statements were true. It appears that in Thessalonica most of the believers were Greeks, but here in Berea most were Jews. Leading Greek women also believed. Many Bible groups take the name "Berean" even today, for these believers' diligent learning habits have followed throughout the years. This should be every Christian's habit today as well—checking all teaching against that of the Word—and many pitfalls could be avoided in so doing.

(Lovett's Lights on Acts, C.S. Lovett-paraphrased)

Acts 17:16-17

Verses 13-15 tell of the difficulties caused by the Thessalonian Jews, and the travel that followed for these missionaries. The Berean brethren were wise in moving Paul out quickly since he was the city's personal target. Then verse 16 tells us of his agony on seeing Athens so full of idols. This fact outweighed the beauty and majesty of their architectural achievements. He knew Athens was the leading center of culture and philosophy of the ancient world, yet none of it was dedicated to the true God. For all of its wisdom and workmanship, the city was as pagan as could be, and none of this extreme idolatry could enlighten the human soul. It grieved Paul's heart to see all that magnificence dedicated to gods that were demon inspired (1 Cor. 10:20). Also, the cultured and refined were more inclined to idolatry than the others.

While waiting for Silas and Timothy to join him, Paul went daily into the marketplace (Agora) where the intellectuals gathered each day to speculate about new ideas. Paul might not have been a match for their classic style, but he definitely was not ashamed of the Gospel! He was ready to submit its claims to the keenest minds and brightest intellects of the city, and here he learned first-hand how the wisdom of this world is at odds with the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:21).

(Lovett's Lights on Acts, C.S. Lovett-paraphrased)

Today's society may not have man-made carvings of idols, but they have substituted the true worship of God with all sorts of idolatrous practices and desires. **Are wealth and power some of our greatest idols today?**

As we desire to witness to people, should we face them with the fact that their perceptions are wrong, and the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the only way? Or, would you say that by subtle addressing of their philosophy, endeavoring to show them what part of it might be considered good, and then moving on into the obvious "cracks" in their ways of thinking, showing them that our Lord has a great answer for that need, for each individual,—that this might be the wiser way of "reaching" them? Here give us your views, and go on to see what Paul did to win them.

Acts 17:18-22

The Epicureans were atheists in that they believed the world was an accident. They believed you were here today and gone tomorrow, so why not enjoy life as much as you can. To them, seeking pleasure was the main purpose of life. They did not deny the existence of any gods, but maintained they were totally indifferent to the affairs of men who were left to find their pleasure as they could. Consequently they were given to gross sensualism. This teaching was founded by Epicurus, who died in Athens 270 years before Christ. He left his home and garden to be used as a headquarters for the Epicureans. It was still maintained at the time Paul visited the city.

The Stoics were the opposite of the Epicureans. They were pantheists, claiming God was in everything and everyone. To them, pleasure was not good and pain was not evil. Virtue was its own reward and vice its own punishment. They denied the immortality of the soul, claiming people were swallowed up in the Deity after physical death. Both Epicureanism and Stoicism were attempts to come to terms with life before the advent of Christianity. Modern

pagans haven't been able to come up with anything any better. The Stoics were founded by Zeno, in Athens, at the same time Epicurus was founding his school. While these two rival schools of thought were opposed to each other, they did agree that the preaching of this itinerant Jew was probably worthless, but there was something in his words that raised their curiosity.

(Lovett's Lights on Acts, C.S. Lovett)

When Paul spoke of "Jesus" and "the resurrection", they thought he was speaking of a new god and goddess. This is why they wanted him examined by the council, which was the ancient court of Athens. This council met out in the open on seats of rock on a hill named after the Roman god of war, "Mars." This, indeed, was the finest place in all of Athens for Paul to speak.

These Athenians had a passion for philosophy and new ideas—not that they would do anything about the ideas—they just wanted to hear them! And to these people an idea became old the moment they heard it—they were "hooked" on news and ideas!

(Lovett's Lights on Acts, C.S. Lovett-paraphrased)

Should these Greeks be commended for their actions even though some called Paul a "babbling," while others said he was bringing forth strange gods?

Acts 17:22-34

The men of Athens had made an altar to the "unknown god" in order that they would not offend any god that they did not yet know. This basic instinct of worship is inherent in all people, and Paul made use of it, to let them know that *this unknown one* was the REAL and ONLY God. As Paul teaches them that this true God is God over all, in heaven and in earth, and man is unable to worship Him with their hands, they are completely amazed, for they had a god for every realm of life! Paul's approach to them is not from the Scriptures, for they had no knowledge of these, but he quoted one of their own poets in saying that "in Him we live and move and have our very being."

Paul skillfully leads them on to an understanding that all people on earth were created by this God; that they needed to seek Him spiritually, and not through material things. He is now bringing them from the things that they knew on to the unknown—the true Gospel, in which this God has appointed a Man who will one day judge them for their sin. This was totally unknown to their Greek philosophy. Paul is careful to show them that God's Man not only reveals God to mankind, but He came to die for their sin. And this almighty God then raised the God-Man from the dead!

At this point their worldly wisdom clashed with the divine wisdom of God, and the people laughed and scoffed at the idea. However, some did believe—one of whom was Dionysius, a member of the 12-man panel making up the Areopagus (also known as "Hill of Ares"—Roman "Mars"—the open forum for philosophical debate). Also a woman named Damaris heard and believed. Paul tells the Corinthian church later that "the preaching of the cross is foolishness to the Greeks" (1 Cor. 1:18).

(Lovett's Lights on Acts, C.S. Lovett-paraphrased)

Do you agree with Paul's method of bringing the salvation message to these people of Athens who had no knowledge of the Bible? As Christians, what part of reaching others for Christ belongs to us? If they don't believe, what responsibility is left to us?

Matt. 10:14 John 8:18 Acts 4:12 Rom. 5:8 1 Cor. 1:18 Eph. 2:5, 8 Titus 3:5

Acts 18:1-17

Leaving Athens, Paul proceeded 45 miles southwest to a town known for its large commerce, as it had two seaports, one facing Europe and one facing Asia. This was the town of Corinth, a wide open city, also known for its wealth and vice. As a world merchandise center, it had a large Jewish colony. Also, a temple was erected to worship Aphrodite, a goddess of sensuousness, and there one would see thousands of priestess-prostitutes offering their fare.

This place pleased Paul for it offered great evangelistic opportunities. Here we are told that Paul was a tentmaker, and he thereby met other Jewish tentmakers, Aquila and his wife Priscilla. In 1 Thess. 2:9 we are also told of his tentmaking in order to earn a living.

Aquila and Priscilla, as Jews, were expelled along with other Jews, from Rome by Emperor Claudius in A.D. 49. Scripture does not tell us whether they were saved before they met Paul, but they do become his friends for life.

On each Sabbath Paul again went into the synagogues to reach the Jews and God-fearing Greeks. His words in 1 Cor. 2:1 surely apply to his methods here: "When I came to you, it was not with the excellency of speech or wisdom ... for I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and

in fear, and in much trembling.” Human wisdom had surely not availed in Athens, so he chose to preach the simple Gospel of Jesus by using O.T. Scriptures teaching about the Messiah, and placing Jesus’ name there.

Silas and Timothy now join him after concluding their work in Macedonia and they bring a monetary gift to him from the church at Philippi. This gave him more time to preach to the Jews, but their hatred for him (and Christ) only became the more intense, causing him finally to make a clean break with them. He now would preach only to the Gentiles. He then moves his ministry to a Gentile’s house next door to the synagogue! But as though that weren’t enough, he then manages to lead the leader of the synagogue, Crispus, to the Lord!

This is becoming a very explosive situation, but when it seemed the worst, the risen Christ appeared to him in a vision, reassuring and comforting him, and giving him divine protection. He now teaches in Corinth 18 months, which was possibly from the Fall of 50 to the Spring of 52. It was also during this time that Paul wrote his two letters to the Thessalonians. From now on for the next five years, rather than establishing more new churches, he now spends time endeavoring to strengthen and enlarge the work at Ephesus and Corinth. While in Ephesus he wrote also to the Corinthians.

Now a new governor comes to the province, and the angry Jews thought he might give them favor, so they had Paul brought before him for judgment, and hopefully silence him. However, this backfired, for they had misjudged this governor, who was more interested in the Roman law than theirs. Had he been charged, word would have spread to the other Roman provinces and Paul’s ministry would have been in jeopardy. But his Lord had promised divine protection!

Following this, the Greeks took Sosthenes, the leader of the synagogue, (who had been Paul’s persecutor) and beat him. But as Scripture says, the governor Gallio took no notice of these things. Finally, one who had hated Paul was now persecuted himself!

(Lovett’s Lights on Acts, C.S. Lovett-paraphrased)

For those, who in obedience to the Word, choose to be faithful witnesses of the Gospel, the walk is not easy—God teaches us that there will be tests and trials, and only a strong, enduring faith in the Lord can see that one through. We know that God has a purpose for all things He brings into a person’s life. **Here give your reasons, backed up with Scripture, why tests and trials are allowed.**

Acts 18:18-23

After staying somewhat longer in Corinth, Paul had a great desire to return to Antioch in Syria. He arranged to take Aquila and Priscilla with him, and left from the eastern seaport of Corinth to go to Syria, which would also take him through Ephesus. While he was in Cenchrea he had his hair cut because he took a Jewish vow.

(Lovett’s Lights on Acts, C.S. Lovett-paraphrased)

This vow is difficult to identify. A Nazarite vow could not be undertaken outside of Judea, so this was probably some private vow of thanksgiving for the fulfillment of God’s promise to him in vv. 9, 10 and his protection in Corinth.

(NKJV New Spirit Filled Life Bible, footnote on Acts 18:18)

Acts 18:24-28

Apollos combined the eloquence of the Greek with the religious instinct of the Jew. A student from the great university at Alexandria, a convert to the Gospel, deeply conversant with the Old Testament, gifted with marvelous eloquence, he was a strong ally of the Christian forces of his age. But he needed to know of the death, resurrection, and ascended power of Christ, and to experience the Pentecostal gift. How wonderful is that holy wisdom which the Spirit of God gives to simple and humble believers, so that they can become teachers of men who are intellectually their superiors!

(Through the Bible Day by Day, F. B. Meyer)

This reading is an excellent description of Apollos’ abilities in the Lord. He was eloquent and knew the O.T. Scriptures well; he was fervent in spirit, taught what he knew accurately, found favor with other Christians, refuted the Jews skillfully, and firmly believed in Jesus Christ. **Can a humble person today accomplish what an Apollos did? Should this inspire us as Christians to be our utmost for the Lord?**

Ex. 32:26-29 Num. 13:30 Num. 25:1-9 Prov. 3:9 Rom. 12:1, 2 1 Cor. 6:20 Acts 27:22-26

Acts 19:1-10

Upon arriving in Ephesus, Paul finds a group of disciples, whose knowledge about the Holy Spirit is defective. Their teachers knew some basics of Christianity from contact with John the Baptist, but they were apparently unaware of the developments of Pentecost. Therefore, these disciples had only been baptized into John's baptism. This indicates that their conversion experience with the Holy Spirit would come (Matt. 3:11), but without the realization that it had come (Acts 2:1-4). Paul remedies this by rebaptizing them in water (the only such account in the N.T.), and by leading them into a fuller experience with the Holy Spirit (v. 6). An obvious parallel to the Day of Pentecost, the Spirit's fullness is displayed by their speaking in tongues and prophesying.

(NKJV New Spirit Filled Life Bible, footnote for Acts 19:1-7)

Luke has placed this lesson at length in the Word for our understanding, as well as for those of Paul's day. When John baptized, he preached only to the Jews who truly needed to repent for rejecting Christ. For these Jews, John's baptisms were outward tokens of turning from evil, but he also told the people they were to turn to the Person who was coming after him—that is, they were to place their trust in Jesus.

For the disciples above, that baptism did not prepare them to receive Christ and was therefore insufficient. Peter had made it plain in Acts 2:38 that they would have to be rebaptized before they could receive the Spirit, and so these new disciples needed it also for the same reason. **Do you understand that the Jewish baptism of John was done before salvation, as repentance from sin (Acts 2:38)? And that Christian baptism by the Apostle Paul was after salvation, as the receiving of the new life (Rom. 6:4)?**

Acts 19:11-20

Where God's Spirit is mightily at work, Satan is not far away. Here the enemy's emissaries were mean enough to use the name of Jesus to get themselves a few more shekels. But the name is useless apart from the living power of the Spirit. It is terrible when the very demons flout those who profess religion. "Who are ye?" meant, "You do not count." The demons knew Christ as the Holy One of God and Paul as his representative, but these exorcist Jews were hollow as sounding brass. Cast into the balances, they were altogether lighter than vanity (Ps. 62:9)

(Through the Bible Day by Day, F. B. Meyer)

Following on after the exorcist drama, it is wise here to state that the authority of the name of Jesus has been granted only to believers (Mark 16:17; Luke 10:17-20). Any prayer offered, or ministry attempted in the name of Jesus must be in accord with His nature and purpose.

(NKJV New Spirit Filled Life Bible, footnote for Acts 19:13-17)

Scripture shows us that the end result of the deeds of the evil seven sons of Sceva not only caused them to flee, but many other people came believing and confessing their own evil, and the name of the Lord Jesus was glorified. Also, the Word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed. **Realizing the great power of the Word, briefly study the following:**

Jesus is the living *logos* (or Word) - John 1:1

The Bible is the written *logos* - Heb. 4:12

The Holy Spirit utters the spoken *logos* - 1 Cor. 2:13

Acts 19:21-41

The religious life of Ephesus centered around the worship of the fertility goddess Artemis (Roman name) or Diana (Greek name)—the Great Mother—worshiped in a temple that was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Paul's success at Ephesus was so great that the cult of Artemis and its mighty temple were seriously affected. Demetrius, apparently head of the silversmith guild or union, manufactured miniatures of the temple and the goddess. The rioters rushed to the theater, well-known from archaeology and inscriptional reference. The crowd's yell, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians," is archaeologically corroborated. The title "great" for a deity was common in antiquity. Many images and other objects of Artemis have been found and references to them occur in inscriptions.

(Unger's Bible Handbook, M. F. Unger)

Demetrius' only true concern was the loss of money in selling his images, but he made his charge against Paul by pretending to crusade for the worship of Artemis (Diana). Paul really had not *come against* their Artemis worship or their magic—no, he just set forth Christ! **And in today's culture, does the Word of God teach us to fight the anti-God systems, or is it enough that we set forth the Lord Jesus Christ—crucified, risen again and soon coming—who has come to bring new life and hope to all who believe? In your opinion, should any form of attack be avoided?**

Is there enough of the positive in the message of Christ's Gospel that makes offensive confrontation completely unnecessary? Please give Scripture verses to back your statements.

Gal. 5:13, 14

Acts 20:1-31

If you will read carefully Acts 20 and 21, you will be impressed with Paul's determination to reach Jerusalem, and as a result he stayed only a short while in each place, and spent less and less time in preaching.

After departing from Greece he stopped at Troas, where he waited for his companions to join him. Here he seems to have preached only one sermon (a long one lasting till midnight). From here Paul goes to Assos, then on to Mitylene, then to Samos, on to Trogyllium, and finally comes to Miletus. He had hoped to stop for a visit to Ephesus but instead he called the elders from Ephesus to Miletus. It is a scene of hurry, hurry, hurry. In only one of the various places he stopped did he take time to preach. And now at Miletus he finds no time to visit Ephesus, less than forty miles away. Why all the hurry, Paul? What is causing this unrest and haste? We have the answer in Acts 20:16,

For Paul had determined to sail by [past] Ephesus, because he would not spend the time in Asia: for he hastened, if it were possible for him, to be at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost (Acts 20:16).

The important word in this verse is *determined*. Paul *determined* to pass up his work in Asia, in order that he might go where God had strictly forbidden him to go. Paul was commissioned to go to the Gentiles, and to stay away from the city of Jerusalem. As long as Paul stuck to his job of evangelizing the Gentiles all was well, but when Paul became obsessed with the desire to step out of the will of God, and go to the city of Jerusalem, his ministry to the Gentiles comes to an abrupt end, and the apostle of *grace* is to find out that grace does not justify disobedience to the will of the Lord.

In our next message we shall trace the rest of Paul's experience in the closing chapters of Acts, which are occupied almost entirely with Paul's arrest, trial and final imprisonment in Rome.

In closing this message we want to make one practical application. Grace does not give license to disobey God. No matter how sincere we may be, it does not excuse disregard for the clear will of God. And Paul was no exception. Why should the Lord permit the apostle of grace to fall into the trap of legalism after his uncompromising declaration of the unconditional grace of God? Why did the Holy Spirit permit Dr. Luke to record for us the tragic end to Paul's public ministry after his wonderful missionary activities? Why must we be told about this man, who had been so faithful, that he spent his closing days in prison, and was executed for his faith? It is written for our admonition. It is a warning that even the godliest of men (even Paul) is not immune to yielding to the temptation of the flesh, when he takes liberties with the clear and unmistakable warnings of God. Paul knew better, for he himself tells us that the experience of Israel in the wilderness was to teach us that we cannot disobey God and escape God's judgment (1 Corinthians 10:1-10) and says,

Now all these things happened unto them for examples:
and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends
of the world [ages] are come.

Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed
lest he fall (1 Corinthians 10:11, 12).

(Pentecost and After, M. R. DeHaan)

Luke, the physician, tells us that "he was dead" (Acts 20:9); and Paul, by the power of the indwelling Lord, restored him to life. Paul's statement to the gathered group was, "... for his life is in him" (Acts 20:10), and he took no glory for himself in this miracle, for his purpose was only to glorify Jesus as Lord, and to continue ministering to his brethren there at Troas. After a whole night of Paul's teaching they closed with the breaking of bread, or communion.

The name of the young man who fell was Eutychus, which means "fortunate!" Indeed, this tells us more of God's ways, for He, of course, knew ahead of time that this incident would happen, causing his death, but also giving opportunity for Paul to wondrously demonstrate the awesome power of God through His Son Jesus. **Whatever problems or trials you may now be experiencing, can you definitely see God's hand not necessarily bringing these upon you—but certainly allowing it? And can you also know without doubt in your heart that God will see you through, and also show you much of His grace in so doing?**

Deut. 31:8 Isa. 26:3 Ps. 27:1-5 Ps. 27:14 Ps. 28:7 Ps. 46:1-3 Ps. 91:2 Ps. 121 (all) 2 Cor. 4:8, 9
John 14:27

In this Chapter 20 we come face to face with the real man of God, Paul, and our hearts cannot fail to be touched with his love and zeal, first for the Lord Jesus Christ and His Word, and second for people everywhere, both Jew and Gentile, that they might be saved. **Why do you believe he so persistently desires to go to Jerusalem? Could it be that he feels the gift of money will help bring Jews and Gentiles together? Is it his love for the Jerusalem disciples, which included James, the brother of Jesus? Here give your thoughts, using Scripture if possible.**

Acts 20:32-38

Paul closes by speaking of the fact that he earned his living by his work, and kept nothing for himself above that. In his writing to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 9:13, 14) he makes it clear that all those who preach the Gospel should be able to receive for their needs from those whom they teach. By his working at his trade he could be independent of course, and thereby keep the Gospel blameless.

(Lovett's Lights on Acts, C.S. Lovett-paraphrased)

By what other verses in Scripture (including the one above) are we shown God's will for us as to how we should support those who do the work of the Gospel? And how freely are we to give?

Acts 21:1-14

As we trace Paul and his companions' journey by seafaring ship to Palestine, Scripture strongly indicates the warm Christian welcomes they received in the many places where the Gospel had gone forth due to their earlier efforts. It has been 20 years since we last heard of Philip the Evangelist in chapter 8, but now we see his continued faithfulness, along with his four daughters whom God had blessed with the gift of prophecy. Here also we see Agabus once more, for he was the one who had predicted the famine while they were in Antioch. But this time his dramatic prophecy was meant to be strong warning to Paul not to continue on to Jerusalem. In spite of the persistence of his friends, however, Paul ruggedly determined to go, for he knew that God's hand was strongly upon him and that the Lord was building His church through him.

(Lovett's Lights on Acts, C.S. Lovett-paraphrased)

This passage contains several warnings given by the Spirit that Paul would encounter trouble during his visit to Jerusalem. But the apostle persisted, later being arrested and sent to Rome under guard. Arguments as to whether or not Paul was in the perfect will of God are pointless. What is useful is to note 1) prophecies do not have to dictate the decisions, or manipulate the will of a godly person; 2) even though they may be true, God's purpose may yet be realized, as was the case in God's will ultimately bringing Paul to Rome.

(NKJV New Spirit Filled Life Bible, footnote for Acts 21:4-12)

We are now coming very close to the end of Paul's life as it has been recorded for us. **From this study and any of your reading of Paul's epistles which cover almost two-thirds of the New Testament, please make a few statements as to how you consider Paul's life overall. Do you have any desire to be like him? If you were in his place, would you have changed anything?**

Acts 21:15-30

Paul and his companions receives another warm reception from James and the elders, who were indeed thankful for the offering. Paul told them of his last five years of ministry—that now great Christian centers were established on both sides of the Aegean Sea, one at Corinth and the other at Ephesus. But the problem was Paul himself there in Jerusalem, for the Judaizers had come to believe that Paul was teaching the Gentiles to forsake Moses, and that they should no longer circumcise or keep the Law.

(Lovett's Lights on Acts, C.S. Lovett-paraphrased)

Of course, this was not true. He did, however, teach that circumcision and Law keeping had nothing to do with salvation (Gal. 2:15, 16). But he never once said they were displeasing to God. As a result, Paul was pictured as an enemy of the Law.

(Lovett's Lights on Acts, C.S. Lovett)

The action here described (the vow and the four men), which was strongly recommended by the leaders of the Church, seems at variance with what Paul so clearly states in his Epistle to the Galatians, 2:3-5. Perhaps it would have been a wiser and stronger policy for him to have remained in quiet obscurity till the feast was over. But we must remember the deep coloring which the proximity of the Temple gave to church life at Jerusalem, and Paul was willing to be guided by men like James, in whose judgment he had full confidence. In addition, he was always willing to yield in

cases which did not concern principle. He acquiesced in such matters for the sake of charity, so that he gladly became as a Jew to Jews, that he might save the Jews, (1 Cor. 9:20).

(Through the Bible Day by Day, F. B. Meyer)

We understand that James' suggestion of the vow to Paul was given only for his good, and for the possibility of quieting the Judaizers' anger against him. And Paul was willing to do whatever was conciliatory, but not destructive of his principles. **Give in your own words what happened, instead of what was planned. In doing so, answer these questions:**

- 1) **Since none but Jews could enter the temple, did his accusers believe Paul had brought Trophimus, an Ephesian Gentile, into the temple with him, thus defiling it?**
- 2) **Were these Judaizers the least bit impressed with this appearance of piety on Paul's part?**
- 3) **What was James' plan of God? Is there any record they fasted and prayed to know His will?**
- 4) **What is your feeling now regarding Paul's determination to go to Jerusalem, instead of Rome?**

Acts 21:31-40

In spite of this manipulation by man—and for the best of intentions—when it appears that Paul will be taken by the mob and executed outside the city so as not to defile the holy temple, God intervenes by bringing the Roman commander of the garrison in response to the violence of the mob. Paul's background of being a Jew gives him the right to ask for permission to defend himself.

Acts 22:1-16

What a sermon Paul preached! His pulpit—the steps that ascended from the Temple level to the Castle of Antonia. His audience—the frenzied crowds who filled the court below him, but who were calmed to silence as they heard the venerable Hebrew speech, which was unintelligible to the Romans around them. His text—the real and personal interposition of the living Christ to arrest his course of persecution and convert him. Here was a fact which to the apostle was the greatest of all facts; namely, that he had seen Jesus Christ, and had been transformed by what he had seen and heard. No light thing could have revolutionized his life. His zeal for the old covenant and his persecution of the Christian sect were guarantees of his anti-Christian bias. He was not shallow or fickle, or likely to be moved by anything less than an imperative revelation.

(Through the Bible Day by Day, F. B. Meyer)

No doubt by now, you will concede that Paul had great zeal for the Lord like no other of his time, which was demonstrated by: his desire to reach the Jews; his determination to evangelize all people; his willingness to lose all things for Christ; his plan to occupy unreached places, and his support of himself. Nevertheless, if zeal is not wholly within the will of God continually, it can bring some sad results. Moses too, had great zeal (Ex. 32:19-32) and also David (1 Sam. 17:26). **As you know these lives, speak briefly as to how their lives matched up to God's calling for them.**

Acts 22:17-30

To the story of his conversion, as given in Acts 9, the apostle here adds a detailed account of that memorable interview in the temple, when he questioned the advisability of the Lord's command that he should leave Jerusalem and received his final and irrevocable commission to go to the Gentiles. It is a great privilege to be permitted to overhear this dialogue! How close and intimate is the disciple's relationship with his Lord! God allowed Abraham, Moses and Jeremiah to reason with Him. He does not crush down our intelligence. It is His own word: "Come, let us reason together." But there is a point beyond which we may not go, when we must accept without question the final instructions of our Captain.

A freeborn Roman was Paul. More than once he had asserted his rights as a Roman citizen, as at Philippi. There are various social and political advantages which we can turn to account in our service of the Gospel, but they cannot carry us very far, and ultimately we are better off if we step out upon the waters simply because Jesus says, "Come."

(Through the Bible Day by Day, F. B. Meyer)

In the 21st verse of our Scripture, Paul tells this crowd that God has sent him to the Gentiles, and with this their anger explodes. From their knowledge of the Old Testament, and especially from the promises given to their first father in the faith, Abraham, God intended that through them "all nations should be blessed." In other words, the whole world should

have the true Gospel. **Why, in your thinking, are they so adamant at this time (and angry) about the Gentiles receiving the good news?**

Gen. 12:1-3 Ps. 2:1-9 Isa. 9::1-7 Isa. 42:1-4 Isa. 52:13-15 Rom. 1:1, 2 Gal. 3:6-9 Isa. 53:11, 12

Acts 23:1-5

The Roman commander's summoning of the high council of the Jews, the Sanhedrin, shows us how much authority Rome had over the Jews. In his defense to them, Paul spoke of his conscience being perfectly clear before God. Then suddenly the high priest Ananias ordered that Paul be struck on his mouth. The historian Josephus informs us that this Ananias was a greedy and violent man, who had once been taken from office for stirring up trouble between the Galileans and the Samaritans. However, the emperor Claudius restored him for political reasons.

In his hasty response, Paul in turn called him a "whitewashed wall" which was the Jewish way of saying "hypocrite." Indeed, Ananias was known for taking money that should go to the lower priests. His striking Paul was illegal, for according to Jewish law, Paul was innocent until found guilty. So this priest violated the very Law he should have upheld.

Upon being reproved, Paul was quick to apologize to these authorities. Paul was not above the Jewish Law and always carried a clean conscience regarding it.

(Lovett's Lights on Acts, C.S. Lovett-paraphrased)

Acts 23:6-10

Paul, being divinely inspired, saw an ingenious way of diverting the attention of his evil accusers from himself to the differences that lay within their own group—that of Pharisees and Sadducees, and get them to pit themselves against each other.

The Pharisees believed that the hope of Israel was tied up in the resurrection. But the Sadducees denied not only the resurrection, but any existence of people as spirit beings or angels. They did believe in the Spirit of God, however.

(Lovett's Lights on Acts, C.S. Lovett)

This time Paul spoke of himself as a Pharisee (he had been), for he hoped to at least get this group to start siding with him. Also, in proving his points, he might be able to speak of the Lord Jesus Christ, for he would show Him as resurrected and the true hope of Israel. **Please read 1 Peter 2:13-18 in connection with the above and prayerfully let these truths be applied to your own lives as well.**

Acts 23:11-15

How timely and precious was the Savior's revelation on the following night! As Paul's heart was sinking amid the solitude of his cell, and he was beginning to think that perhaps the predictions of Agabus and others were about to be fulfilled, he suddenly became aware of the presence of the Lord. Do not trust in your own understanding; let your Master steer your course. Remember that in the darkest hour, as in the brightest, He is beside you. There will be made to you, at "the fourth watch of the night," revelations which will reassure your weary and despairing soul that you are not alone.

The Lord had told His servant that he was needed in Rome, but the conspirators said that he should not leave Jerusalem. There is only one conclusion when such a collision occurs—God's Word must stand, to the discomfiture of those who have sworn that they will neither eat nor drink till they have perpetrated their plan to the contrary.

(Through the Bible Day by Day, F. B. Meyer)

Like all of us, Paul had his moments of discouragement. We read in Acts 18:9 that he despaired at Corinth and the Lord lifted him up. Another incident will happen on his voyage to Rome (27:23)—but the Lord lifts him from each depression and places him on top again! The Lord would not allow him to bear more than he could take (1 Cor. 10:13). **What lesson do you derive from this for your own situation, especially if it looks bleak? And what verses of comfort and strength can you pass on to others?**

Acts 23:16-35

Scripture never tells us about Paul's family, except now the Lord arranges somehow for Paul's sister's son to find out about the plot against Paul to take his life, warning the commander in time to save him. With many soldiers and

horsemen, they depart at 9:00 at night for Caesarea where he will appear before Felix the governor. Paul is out of the hands of the Jews, and eventually will go on to Rome.

(Lovett's Lights on Acts, C.S. Lovett-paraphrased)

Acts 24:1-27

Paul was always on the lookout for the one ray of light in murky skies. He found a reason for counting himself happy in this dark hour, v. 10. He held himself with great dignity. He remembered that he was always God's ambassador, representing the court of Heaven amid the perverse courts of human government. As for the charge of sedition, he challenged his adversaries to prove it. He pointed out that as the nation was already divided into Pharisees and Sadducees, they could hardly find fault with him for belonging to a third sect—that of the Nazarenes. After the way which they called a sect or "heresy," v. 14, he worshiped God, but he had never stirred up strife in temple or synagogue. He protested that it had been the aim of his life to keep a conscience void of offense toward God and man.

At first the governor was prepossessed in Paul's favor. He had some intimate knowledge concerning the tenets of the early Church, v. 22. He had studied it as an intellectual system, and enjoyed having opportunity for conversation with its foremost exponent. But his illicit union with Drusilla, whose husband was living, and his hope to receive a bribe from Paul's friends made him obtuse and dead to the claims of Christ. Paul, on the other hand, seemed oblivious to any thought of himself or of his dependence on the governor's whim, and used his one opportunity in seeking the salvation of this weak and sordid soul. It was in vain. Felix was anchored to a mudbank and would not avail himself of the rising tides of life about him.

(Through the Bible Day by Day, F. B. Meyer)

Most people, when coming before governors and kings, believe they should give high honor and recognition to these rulers. However, many times this verbal honor has a false note to it, for they know that the ruler is not above sinning. Paul, on the other hand, is polite and recognizes position, but he never places them in the false height that the world does. **Give your reasons for Paul's being different from the rest.**

Acts 25:1-12

Little is known about Porcius Festus, except he was more honorable in his administration than his predecessor, Felix, who had killed many of the leaders of the Jews. Festus had little true knowledge of the Jews and their plots, and he died early in office, according to the historian Josephus. Festus visits Jerusalem in order to bring about peace in his province, and is confronted by the continuing persistence of the Jewish leaders to take Paul's life. Once again, they followed Festus back to Caesarea, in order to accuse Paul with serious complaints, but they had no proof.

In trying to please these Jews, Festus asked Paul if he would go to Jerusalem to be tried there, but this time Paul had complete recognition that it would only mean his death, and it would not accomplish God's purposes for his life. Therefore, as a Roman citizen, he demanded that he be brought before Caesar, who was the young emperor Nero.

(Lovett's Lights on Acts, C.S. Lovett-paraphrased)

While Jesus was still on earth, he gave His disciples full instructions on what they should do and say. When brought before kings and governors, they are to be a testimony. **Read Matthew 10:16-33 and Luke 12:1b-12, and then jot down a few sentences covering the strength of His teachings in this regard.**

Acts 25:13-27

Festus, being unskilled, especially with regard to the Jews, did not know how to draft a letter about Paul to Caesar, while at the same time keeping his own record clear. Then King Agrippa II and his sister (wife) Bernice come to pay him a visit and congratulate him as governor of Palestine. This secular king of the Jewish Church would be able to give him counsel and advice, especially with regard to the Jews and their religion.

(Lovett's Lights on Acts, C.S. Lovett-paraphrased)

This is Herod Agrippa II, the son of Herod Agrippa I who beheaded James (brother of John) and imprisoned Peter. He was only 17 when his father was struck down by God that day when he was giving his speech (Acts 12:20-23). When he came of age, after being educated at Rome, emperor Claudius gave him the tiny kingdom of Chalcis (north of Damascus) and the title of king to go with it. But as he grew in prominence, he was later given the tetrarchy of Philip, the area east and N.E. of the sea of Galilee. Thus his kingdom joined the land governed by Festus. He was, for the most

part, of Jewish blood. He was descended from Maccabean priest-kings. He had a palace at Jerusalem and frequently made generous gifts to the temple. His personal life was another matter; he paid no attention to the Law. He was an adulterer, every bit as sensuous and pleasure loving as his sister Drusilla, who was married to the deposed governor Felix.

Festus, ignorant as he was of Jewish affairs, was astute enough to pick up the central issue in the Jews' charges. It seemed to focus on "one Jesus." The remark which Festus makes is one of disrespect. He is ignorant of the Lord. From this we gather that Jesus Himself was the real issue amidst the angry charges made by the Jews. Festus was too ignorant to catch the real significance. But this is not the case with Agrippa. His ears perked up at the mention of Jesus and Paul. The king was known to be a zealous Jew, regardless of his way of life. He had often heard of both of these men. And to think that the outstanding leader of the Christian movement was right there in the palace whets his interest. What may have seemed trivial to Festus, appears as a unique opportunity to Agrippa. He is thrilled to have Festus arrange an audience for the next day.

(Lovett's Lights on Acts, C.S. Lovett)

As we look at the lives of these rulers who had been given earthly authority to judge this man, Paul, whose life had been drastically changed by God—who was then empowered and called to a life of service preaching His Gospel—what comes quickly to your mind regarding the conflict that always exists between those of the natural, flesh realm, and those who live according to the Spirit?

Rom. 8:5-8 Rom. 8:18-21 Gal. 5:16-26 Eph. 2:4-7

Acts 26:1-32

Paul was in his element. He was delivering to kings and governors the testimony which it was the constant object of his life to give, when suddenly he was stopped by Festus, who on hearing of the resurrection of the dead, accused Paul of madness. Paul addressed him with perfect respect, and then turned to King Agrippa for support. But Agrippa did not choose to be entrapped in the discussion of these deep religious truths. With the contempt of a man of the world he smiled at the enthusiastic earnestness of this man who fancied that a wearer of purple would embrace faith in a crucified Messiah. It was as if he said, "In a little while you'll be making me—a Christian!"

(Through the Bible Day by Day, F. B. Meyer)

Agrippa faced a dilemma! If he said no, he would anger the Jews; if he said yes, he would lose face because Paul would ask him to believe the Gospel.

(New Geneva Study Bible, footnote for Acts 26:27)

Would you agree that the truths of the Bible always have the way of having the "last word?" Another example would be Jonah who was angered by God's wanting to save Nineveh. **Here you have a choice in options: 1) Give other examples in the Bible where the finality of God's Word accomplished His purposes in spite of the opposition of others; or 2) using your imagination, tell what you believe Agrippa would say and feel when he realized he had missed his chance for God's heaven as his destination.** Almost—what a weighty word!

Acts 27:1-44

The travelers were fortunate enough to find at Myra a large vessel carrying wheat from Egypt to Rome. There was room for the centurion, his soldiers, and the prisoners, as well as such others as chose to accompany them. It was toward the close of September; and perhaps at Fair Havens the apostle and any Jewish Christians on board may have observed the great Day of Atonement, the one fast of the Jewish calendar. The season for navigation with sailing vessels was drawing to a close, and Paul counseled they delay, but his words were unheeded. The man who knew God was wiser than the men who knew the sea.

The crew, being greatly exhausted by severe exertion and want of food, were the more willing to listen to the apostle when he came to the front with his wise counsel and good cheer. They had previously ignored his advice, but were glad and wise enough to take it on this second occasion.

How calm faith makes us! We can sleep soundly amid the roar of the storm, and dream of angels when our hearts are stayed on God. His messengers can cleave their way through the murkiest skies and most drenching storms, to succor those who need their help. What a beautiful confession that was: "Whose I am, and whom I serve!"

Once more Paul encouraged them, and urged them to take food. He himself set the example, giving thanks to God in the presence of them all. How brave and how inspiring was his behavior! They all began to be of good cheer. Men may say what they will about the impracticability of Christ's teachings, but let a man once begin to live by them, obeying them

absolutely and trusting Christ utterly, and he becomes like a lion in courage. Through God we can do valiantly, for He treads down our enemies, Ps. 60:12.

(Through the Bible Day by Day, F. B. Meyer)

This sailing trip was a tempestuous trial for all on board, and it could have been avoided had they heeded Paul's warnings. His heart was continually "tuned" to any word or direction from God, but those who do not know Him can depend only upon their own instincts and strengths. And, finally when the ship went aground on an island, Paul's assurance from God that no lives would be lost, and his trusting demeanor caused all the others to look to him for leadership. **In our hour of trial in the midst of our storms, to what may we cling for direction, comfort and peace? Give as many verses as you can besides the ones listed. Do we also need to do our part?**

Isa. 40:1, 2 Isa. 41:10 1 Thess. 5:14 2 Cor. 2:7 2 Cor. 7:5-7

Acts 28:1-10

Through God's continual care in every situation, they found themselves on the tiny island of Malta (south of Sicily and Italy), formerly called "Melita" meaning refuge, and this proved to be a haven for them as the natives showed them unusual kindness.

Accidents are not punishments. The clinging of the viper to Paul's hand was not an evidence of the anger of God, but was permitted in order to give these simple-hearted people an evidence which they would appreciate of God's care for his own.

Let us not judge by appearance but righteously. Because Paul cast off the viper, they accounted him divine; if he had died, they would have thought him a felon. Let us also shake off temptation. We cannot prevent its attacking us, but we need not take the viper into our heart.

(Through the Bible Day by Day, F. B. Meyer)

In all of our lives, unusual circumstances happen, causing us to question—is this of God, or could it possibly be of Satan. We should be extremely careful not to make early judgments, for often God has something special to show us or teach us as the circumstances unfold. How very wise it is, as the following Scriptures teach us, to wait on the Lord! Then when true, solid peace comes following your waiting on Him at any time; you know you're on His right track! Watch for His revelation next!

Isa. 30:15, 18 Isa. 40:31 Ps. 103:1-5 2 Cor. 4:8-12, 16-18

Acts 28:11-31

Paul went toward Rome, as we have seen, under very different circumstances from those that he originally anticipated; but after all, they gave him the greatest opportunity of his life. The things that befell him were for the furtherance of the Gospel. In no other way could he have approached such men as the centurion, or the members of Caesar's household, or Publius, or Nero himself.

(Through the Bible Day by Day, F. B. Meyer)

Paul expounded the Scriptures to the Jews in Rome and at the end of the day realized that many Jews refused to adopt the messianic truths fulfilled in Jesus Christ. He knew that these people would continue to harden their hearts and cut themselves off from the living God. In his opinion, these Jews could be compared with natural olive branches that were broken off—the olive tree stands for the true Israel—because they had died a spiritual death. Paul says that because of unbelief they were broken off (Rom. 11:20). Persistent unbelief leads to hardening of the heart. Hardening of the heart leads to apostasy and the sin that leads to death (1 John 5:16).

(Acts, Simon J. Kistemaker)

Epaphras came to visit Paul while he was in Rome, bringing disturbing news about the Church in the area of Colossae. Paul responded by writing Colossians and following it with Ephesians, a letter intended for all the churches of Asia, not just Ephesus.

During these two years he leads a runaway slave, Onesimus, to Christ and sends him back to his master, Philemon, with a letter which we know as the book of Philemon.

Finally he does stand before Nero. While awaiting the verdict he wrote to the Philippians who had sent him a love gift and also Epaphroditus to minister to him.

After this Paul was released. According to Eusebius he preached not only in Spain but to the limits of the Roman Empire. During this time he wrote 1 Timothy and Titus. Then it appears from historians that he was again arrested and taken to Rome where, just before his martyrdom, he wrote 2 Timothy.

"I am now ready to be poured out as a libation; the time of my release is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved His appearing." 2 Timothy 4:6-8