

Lesson 1

Introduction to The Acts of the Apostles

Acts 1:1-3

The Author

The first verse points the reader back to the book of Luke which is obviously the "former account" (Luke 1:1-4). Clearly, the author of the book of Luke is also the one who penned the book of Acts. The "we" passages show the author was a companion of Paul's (Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-21:18; 27:1-28:16). He also had a keen interest in sick people and their diseases (Luke 4:38; 5:12; 6:6; 8:43-44, 55; 9:38ff.; 22:50-51). When Matthew and Mark write about the camel passing through the eye of the needle, they use the common term for a household needle, while we find the word for a surgeon's needle in Luke 18:25. As Luke was called "the beloved physician" by Paul in Colossians 4:14, he is the most likely author of both Luke and Acts. Early writings agree with that conclusion.

Luke's name is thought to have been an abbreviation of Loukanos. Some believe 2 Corinthians 8:18 indicates that this Christian doctor was Titus' brother. He may have been a Gentile. As Paul extends final greetings at the end of the Colossian letter, he begins by listing some who are circumcised and extend greetings. Then, he lists others, not of the circumcised, who also extend greetings. Luke is among the latter (Colossians 4:7-15). He does not appear to have been an eyewitness of Christ's walk on earth (Luke 1:2). Instead, he recorded what eyewitnesses had reported to him and others. It should also be observed that the physician was loyal to Paul as he was with him when the letter to Philemon was written. Later, he stayed with the apostle despite very trying and dangerous circumstances (Philemon 24; 2 Timothy 4:9-12).

The Recipient

The recipient of the book was a man named Theophilus, meaning "one who loves God." In Luke, he is addressed as "most excellent," which was a type of title used for those in the Roman government (Acts 23:26; 24:3; 26:25). Gardner suggests Theophilus may have been Luke's benefactor in this writing. That is, he may have supported him while the work was being written. Since the title was dropped by the time the book of Acts was written, Gardner also wonders if Theophilus may have been converted by his study of the first book, Luke.

Purpose

Perhaps Luke's opening remarks can shed a little light on his purpose for writing. "The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach" (Acts 1:1). The beloved physician seems to have thought of Acts as a continuation of his account of the works and words of Jesus. Remember the church is the body of Christ. That is why, when Paul persecuted the church, Jesus asked, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" In a very real sense, the works of the church could be described as the works of Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23; Acts 9:4). So, it might be said that Acts gives its readers an overview of the

workings of Jesus for the thirty years following his resurrection.

The Lord told Zacchaeus his reason for coming to earth when he said, "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). Thus, McGarvey's thinking about Luke's purpose for writing is easily understood. He says, "Much the greater part of Acts may be resolved into a detailed history of cases of conversion, and of unsuccessful attempts at the conversion of sinners. If we extract from it all cases of this kind, with the facts and incidents preparatory to each and immediately consequent upon it, we will have exhausted almost the entire contents of the narrative."

Setting the Stage

Luke tells his reader that his first book set forth those things Jesus did and taught. It seems significant that he would mention actions first, then words. Unlike those of us who have sinned, Jesus' actions were consistent with his preaching. In fact, they underscored his teachings. Those actions and words were concluded on the day our Lord ascended into the heavens to be seated on the right hand of the Father. In his instructions following the resurrection, the stage was set for the remainder of the book of Acts (1:1).

While on earth, Jesus took the form of a man and relied on the Holy Spirit to empower him to work miracles. Such resulted in the warning Jesus gave those who would attribute his power to work miracles to the devil. After all, he really worked miracles by the power of the Holy Spirit (Mark 3:20-30). Paul even told the Roman brethren he was raised by the power of the Spirit (Romans 1:4). Luke tells us Jesus also gave commands through the Holy Spirit (1:2).

The apostles were the ones who received those commands of the Christ. After all, they had seen him alive after his death and burial, as could be proven by over five hundred witnesses (1 Corinthians 15:1-11). For forty days, the resurrected King taught his chosen apostles important truths concerning the kingdom of God, or church (1:3). From the time Jesus ascended, he spoke to his apostles through the promised Spirit (John 16:13). So, in the truest sense, the title for this book could be "The Acts of Jesus As Seen in the Workings of the Spirit in the Lives of the Apostles."

Discussion Questions

1. Who do you think wrote the book of Acts? Why?
2. Who was the recipient of the book? What type of man do you think he was?
3. What do you think was the author's purpose in writing Acts? Why?
4. In what sense is it appropriate to say the book of Acts is a continuation of the history of the things Jesus did and taught?
5. Discuss the united efforts of Christ and the Holy Spirit in scripture.

Lesson 2

Waiting for the Kingdom

Acts 1:4-26

The Promise of the Holy Spirit

During the days following the resurrection, Jesus appeared to his apostles on several different occasions. On the one mentioned in Acts 1:4, the Lord may have eaten with the apostles, as the margin of the American Standard Version suggests. Certainly, we know Jesus did eat with his disciples following the resurrection. Luke records one incident in Luke 24:36-43. Peter told those assembled in the house of Cornelius that Jesus ate and drank with certain witnesses following being raised from the dead.

However, what really matters is that he instructed them to remain in Jerusalem until the Father's promise, about which he had told them, came. The promise he refers to is the coming of the Comforter, or Helper (John 14:15-18; 16:5-15). All the apostles had been baptized by John in water at their repentance, but Jesus told them before many days passed they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5; Mark 1:4).

Questions Concerning the Kingdom

Concepts developed in childhood are sometimes difficult to change. Such was certainly the case with the apostles' thinking about the kingdom Jesus would establish. They believed it would be an earthly kingdom that would conquer all of its enemies. So, "they asked Him saying, 'Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?'" The Lord told them only the Father knows the precise timing of events he has planned, which would include the establishment of the kingdom and the end of time (Acts 1:6-7; Matthew 24:36).

While they could not know God's timetable, it was important for the apostles to know they were to receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them. Then, they were to take their witness into all the world, radiating out in ever widening circles from Jerusalem (Acts 1:8).

Jesus Ascends Into Heaven

Having issued these final instructions, Jesus began to bless the apostles. At that moment, Jesus was taken up into a cloud. This is the fulfillment of the Lord's own prediction when he asked his disciples, "What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before?" (John 6:62; see also Mark 14:62). Before he came to earth, Jesus was with the Father in Heaven. The apostles saw him begin his ascent back to the throne.

One can almost imagine the apostles standing, mouths agape, looking up into the clouds where they had last seen the Savior. While they were looking, Luke tells us two men in white clothing stood by and told them Jesus would come again in the same way they had seen him go. Matthew describes the appearance of the angel who rolled away the stone by saying, "His countenance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow." Since it seems the two men in shining garments in Luke 24:4 are called angels in John 20:12, it is very likely the two "men" who Luke says stood by the apostles are angels who appeared in the form of

men (Acts 1:9-11; Luke 24:50-51). The statements of the angels in reference to the Lord's return clearly indicate he will come literally, visibly and in his glorified body.

Praying in Jerusalem

In full accord with the Lord's instructions, those who had seen Jesus ascend went into the city of Jerusalem and assembled in an upper room. In his previous writing to Theophilus, Luke had said their return to the city was a joyful one. He also reported that they "were continually in the temple praising and blessing God" (Luke 24:52-53). Clearly, the time of sorrow following the crucifixion was over and the apostles realized the events they had witnessed were reason for rejoicing. The eleven, Mary, the Lord's mother, his half-brothers and some other unidentified disciples were constantly found in prayer as they awaited the promise of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:12-14).

Matthias Chosen to Take Judas' Office

Sometime during that period of waiting, Peter addressed a group of about 120 disciples in reference to the office formerly held by Judas. He had to be replaced because he had been numbered with them and had a part in the ministry the Lord had given to the apostles.

The entire assembly would have been acquainted with the facts surrounding Judas' death and the purchase of the "Field of Blood." Having realized what he had done, Judas threw the thirty pieces of silver down in the temple and went out and hanged himself. From what Luke further reports, we conclude either the branch he used to hang himself on or the rope itself broke and Judas' body fell and burst open. The chief priests did not feel blood money should be placed in the treasury, so they purchased a field in which to bury strangers (Acts 1:15-19; Matthew 27:3-10).

Quoting from Psalm 69:25 and 109:8, Peter reported that the Holy Spirit, through David, had said the habitation of Judas, perhaps as Ash suggests referring to the Field of Blood, would become desolate and another would be chosen to take his office. So, Peter set forth certain qualifications necessary for one to be chosen to take the office of an apostle. He had to have been with the Lord from the time of the baptism of John to the ascension. He would especially need to be able to stand forth as a witness of the resurrection (Acts 1:20-22).

Two men were selected who met those qualifications, Barsabas, surnamed Justus, and Matthias. Then, they addressed a prayer to the One who knows hearts, thus acknowledging their own inability to see into the inward thoughts of others. Their prayer was also a means of expressing complete dependance upon God for making a correct decision. They asked that the Ruler of the universe guide the selection process so that the right man would be chosen. "And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles" (Acts 1:23-26).

Discussion Questions

1. Explain the importance of the apostles being baptized with the Holy Spirit.
2. Discuss the establishment and nature of the Lord's kingdom.
3. How should the promise of the Lord's return effect you day to day?
4. Discuss the importance of prayer to the Lord and how such affected the apostles.
5. Briefly relate what happened to Judas. Why do you think it was necessary for another to be chosen to take his office?

Lesson 3

The Baptism Of the Holy Spirit

Acts 2:1-13

The Baptism of the Holy Spirit

John the Baptist foretold that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit. God told John the one who would administer that baptism was the one "Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him". No mere apostle could baptize someone with the Holy Spirit. It had to be the Son of God. Of course, that same Son must one day baptize some with the fire of judgment (Matthew 3:10-12; John 1:31-34; Revelation 20:14-15; 21:8).

It should be remembered that baptism involves an immersion or overwhelming. Paul helps one understand the meaning of baptism in Colossians 2:12. "Buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead." The apostle to the Gentiles viewed baptism as a burial.

The mother of James and John asked for her sons to be seated on Jesus' right hand. He asked if they were able to be baptized as he would be (Matthew 20:20-23). The context makes it plain he was speaking of a baptism of suffering. As Nichols says, "It was an overwhelming of suffering, and a submersion, as it were in what is figuratively referred to as an 'element' of suffering" (1 Peter 3:18). Similarly, when the word baptism is used in connection with the Holy Spirit, it "carries with it the idea (although figuratively expressed) of the amount of the Holy Spirit given and received in the case" (Nichols, p. 89).

Pentecost

The first feast of the Jewish year was Passover. Passover was always on the evening of the fourteenth day of the month of Abib, which was the first month (Exodus 12:2; 13:4). The second feast followed fifty days later. In the New Testament it is called Pentecost (Acts 2:1; 20:16; 1 Corinthians 16:8). "This feast has three names in the Old Testament; they are 'feast of weeks' (Ex. 34:22; Deut. 16:10), 'feast of harvest' (Ex. 23:16), and 'day of first-fruits' (Num. 28:26)," according to Boles.

He went on to explain that "it came at the end of the reaping season, when all the wheat and barley had been cut and gathered. It was held at the central sanctuary. (Deut. 16:11.) The people were expected to assemble at the place of the altar and hold their celebration." Pentecost was a happy celebration of God's great provision. Freewill offerings were made with a special emphasis placed upon doing good for the Levites, strangers, orphans and widows (Deuteronomy 16:10-14).

The Promise of the Father

Remember, just before his ascension to the throne in heaven, Jesus told his apostles to wait in Jerusalem "for the Promise of the Father, 'which,' He said, 'you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.'" He also promised they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them. In Luke 24:49, Jesus said, "Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high." In contrast to the baptism of the great commission, which was a command, the baptism of the Holy Spirit was a promise.

The ones who first received the promise were to go into all the world preaching the gospel (Acts 1:1-8; compare Luke 24:46-49). Since a pronoun always refers to its antecedent, one must go back all the way to Acts 1:2 to discover the "you" of verse 8 refers to the apostles. The Holy Spirit played a significant role in the fulfillment of the command to go into all the world. As the Lord said, "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you" (John 14:26).

The first physical evidence the Promise had come was a sound like a rushing, mighty wind which filled the house in which the apostles were sitting. We know the "they" of 2:1 refers to the apostles because 1:26 tells us Matthias was numbered with the eleven. As a second evidence, divided tongues which looked like fire appeared to them and sat on each of them. Finally, each spoke in a language he had never studied. In these ways, the Holy Spirit's presence was made known (Acts 2:1-4).

The Audience Reaction

Moses instructed that all males be present for the feast of Pentecost, so it is no surprise that Luke would say, "Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven." Luke listed at least fifteen separate nations represented on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:5, 9-11). "The list of geographical names shows the diversity of the people to whom the apostles spoke, the provinces and locations mentioned lying in all directions from Jerusalem and representing a cross-section of the languages spoken in the entire Roman empire" (Coffman).

The coming of the Holy Spirit was effectively confirmed by the witnesses who came together because of the sound like a rushing, mighty wind and said they heard every man in the language in which he was born. The audience did not have to be told something unusual was happening. The apostles did not have to tell everyone that they had received, or gotten, as some say, the Spirit. Those from the fifteen nations mentioned by Luke heard them speaking in their own tongues, or languages. They also saw that which Christ poured out. Their surprise at what they heard and saw moved them to seek possible explanations. Some merely wondered at the meaning of the occurrences, while others said the apostles were drunk (Acts 2:6-7, 11-13, 33).

Discussion Questions

1. In your own words, explain what the baptism of the Holy Spirit is, who administers it and what impact it has on those receiving it.
2. Describe the significance of the day of Pentecost to the Jews.
3. Why do you think the coming of the Holy Spirit was so necessary for the apostles?
4. What evidence of the Spirit's coming caused the Jews to assemble on Pentecost?
5. Describe the miracle which occurred and the reaction of the audience.

Lesson 4

Proclaiming Christ As King

Acts 2:14-36

Spoken By Joel

Peter immediately set out to end the wild speculations as to the cause of the apostles being able to speak in languages they had never studied. First, he observed that it was just 9 a.m. Coffman wrote, "On a festival like Pentecost, no Jew ever ate or drank anything till after 9 A.M." Certainly, then, they could not be drunk. Second, he told the assembled crowd that the things they had seen and heard were the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel 2:28-32. The Jews understood Joel's prophecy, coupled with those of Isaiah (2:2-4) and Micah (4:1-5), regarding the last days to be a specific reference to the coming of the Messiah. John described the time of his writing as "the last hour," the writer of Hebrews knew he and his readers were in "these last days" and Peter said the redemptive blood of Jesus "was manifest in these last times for you" (1 John 2:18; Hebrews 1:2; 1 Peter 1:20).

Peter plainly says the pouring out of the Spirit upon the apostles was the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel. Peter thereby notified his hearers that they were living in the last days. While not all of Joel's prophecy was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost, such is not disturbing because the writing was concerning a period of days rather than a single day. Later, the Spirit would be poured out on the Gentiles, thereby including all flesh, and some daughters would prophesy (Acts 10:44-47; 21:9). Additionally, it can even now truthfully be said that, "whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:14-21; Romans 10:9-17). Calling on the name of the Lord entails one asking the Lord by his authority to set one free from his sins, an act which can only be accomplished by yielding to his will as it was expressed in his commandments (Matthew 7:21; Mark 16:16; Acts 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21).

They Crucified God's Approved Man

No one could successfully deny that Jesus had worked miracles because they had been done in plain view. Those miracles should have inspired awe (wonder) in the hearts of those who saw them and been a clear sign that Jesus was God's spokesman and, in fact, His Son (John 5:36; 10:25; 20:30-31; Hebrews 2:4). Peter, recognizing the Lord's greatness, was moved to feel his own unworthiness in the presence of the Lord (Luke 5:1-11). Some clearly recognized these displays of God's power for what they were and believed in the Son. The nobleman whose son was at the point of death and some of the Jews who had gone to comfort Mary were in this category (John 4:46-54; 11:45). Others explained the miracles away by attributing them to the power of Satan, criticizing and seeking an opportunity to kill the Lord (Matthew 12:22-30; Mark 3:1-6; John 11:1-57). Oddly enough, they recognized Jesus' works as mighty but looked beyond that fact to the potential result of their losing power!

Imagine the shock of those who ultimately succeeded in crucifying the One by whom they felt threatened when Peter said God had actually known beforehand the actions they would take! Their shock could only have been compounded by the realization that God allowed them to crucify Jesus and then raised him from the dead (Acts 2:22-24)! Yet, a careful study of God's writings, which they claimed to so admire, would have revealed both God's foreknowledge and his intent to let them crucify the Messiah and then raise him so he could see his children (Genesis 3:15; Isaiah 53:6-12).

David's Prophecies Concerning Christ

Peter quoted from Psalm 16:8-11, saying that in it David was speaking concerning the Christ. Jesus died and his body was laid in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, but his spirit, or soul, went to Paradise in Hades (Luke 23:43-56; 16:19-31). However, our Lord trusted the Father to reunite his soul with his resurrected body in a powerful display intended to leave no doubt as to the true identity of Jesus of Nazareth. Referring to Psalm 16:8-11, Coffman says, "It is absolutely certain that this passage from the OT prophesies a resurrection of someone, for it is only by a resurrection that one could descend into the grave (Hades) and not see corruption" (Acts 2:25-28).

That David did not speak of himself is clearly seen in the fact that his body saw corruption and was still in its grave in the very city of Jerusalem where Peter spoke. Peter argued that David knew when he wrote of God's Holy One he was not speaking of himself but, through the voice of prophecy, was speaking of the promised King who would arise from among his offspring. Peter and the eleven who stood with him were witnesses of the very resurrection David had foretold. They had seen Jesus in his resurrected body (Acts 2:29-32)!

Peter could testify Jesus was now seated on his throne in heaven because the Holy Spirit had come. During his earthly ministry, Jesus had told his apostles, "Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you" (John 16:5-15, esp. 7). The apostle to the Jews used a further quotation from David to prove Jesus Christ was to be Lord over David and rule from his throne, not on earth, but in heaven (Acts 2:33-35; Psalm 110:1).

Jesus Is Master and King

The unmistakable conclusion of all the previous arguments is that Jesus of Nazareth was made Master and King by the Eternal Father (Acts 2:36). The very one they had crucified had now been placed by God in the position of authority. Anyone wishing to come to the Father would have to yield to Him!

The evidence presented by Peter on Pentecost was irrefutable. He had opened up two separate prophecies of David before their eyes. He had presented the testimony of reliable witnesses who had seen the resurrected Lord. He had called his listeners' attention to the unique events of the day, which had to have originated from heaven itself through the workings of God's Spirit. If Jesus' tomb still contained Jesus' remains, surely the Jews would have thrown them down in front of Peter and asserted that his body was corrupting just as David's had. The fact that they remained silent is strong evidence of the Lordship of Jesus!

Discussion Questions

1. Explain the significance of Joel 2:28-32 to the events of Pentecost.
2. How does one call on the name of the Lord in order to find salvation?
3. Describe some of the evidences of Christ's Sonship which some Jews had seen and ignored?
4. Explain how David's prophecies relate to Peter's argument that God had made Jesus King.
5. Why do you believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God?

Lesson 5

Those Added to the Church

Acts 2:37-47

"Cut to the Heart"

It is hard to imagine just how stunned some in Peter's audience must have been. The man who they recognized as a Galilean and likely viewed as uneducated had just presented a compelling argument in which he indicted them as the murderers of the Son of God. His presentation was so powerful because of the "Comforter," or "Helper," or "Advocate," which are the various ways to interpret the Greek word *Paraclete*. Bales used several authors to show the word literally means attorney for the defense in a court of law. The Holy Spirit used undeniable truths to show Jesus was the Son of God despite the Jews' accusations to the contrary.

Jesus described the Spirit's work in John 16:5-15. He said, in part, "And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged." The evidence presented by Peter on Pentecost, as delivered to him by the Comforter, truly convicted many in his audience. In fact, Luke reports, "Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?'"

The Keys to the Kingdom

In Matthew 16:19, Jesus promised Peter, "And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." On the cross, Jesus asked his Father to forgive those who crucified him in ignorance. Both these passages find the beginning of their fulfillment in Acts 2:38. The Holy Spirit, through Peter, had already identified those in the assembled multitude as those who had used lawless hands to crucify God's Son. When they asked what they must do to be saved, Peter told them to, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Repenting involves a change of will, or mind (Matthew 21:28-32). Baptism is a dipping, plunging, immersing or overwhelming. Today, we would say baptism is a burial (Colossians 2:12). Both repentance and baptism were to be done in the name of Jesus. Bales says, "Of course, Peter was not telling them in Acts 2:38 what he would say when he baptized them, but rather what they were to do in being baptized, i.e. they were to be baptized resting on His name, submitting to His authority, depending on Him as Savior and Lord."

The purpose of repentance and baptism under the authority of Jesus was to receive the promised result of the remission of sins. Luke recorded Peter's words using the Greek tense which set forth what he said as an urgent command. His urgency stemmed from the fact that such actions were required for them to receive the salvation they had sought. In 1 Peter 3:21, the apostle explained that baptism is the means of one's calling on God to cleanse him based upon the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus.

The Gift of the Holy Spirit

A further benefit of submitting to Christ's authority in repentance and baptism is the reception of the gift of the Holy Spirit. Peter explained that the promise of the gift was available to the Jews, their children and the Gentiles, or those who were afar off. Of course, the promise is only for those who the Lord calls. However, the only limitation on God's call stems from man's willingness, or lack thereof, to respond to God's call since it clearly extends to all who will work righteousness (Acts 10:34-35). The Spirit is ready to give life to any who will submit to God and then make that individual's body his temple (Romans 8:9-11; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

Peter pleaded with his listeners to save themselves from the wicked generation in which they lived. Those who obediently received the words of Peter were receiving the words of Christ, since the Lord said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me" (John 13:20; Luke 10:16). Because they received the Lord's words, about three thousand were added together in the kingdom (Acts 2:38-41).

The Early Church At Work

Those who were added together gave constant attention to the apostles' teaching because, as we have just seen, it was the teaching of Christ. Remember Jesus told his followers to teach those who had been baptized to "observe all things that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:18-20). In adhering to his instructions, the apostles taught them about "fellowship," which is from the Greek word *koinonia*. Thayer says it means, "association, community, communion, joint participation, intercourse... used of the intimate bond of fellowship which unites Christians." They enjoyed each other's company and gladly shared their material possessions when anyone had need (Romans 15:26; 2 Corinthians 8:4; 9:13).

The apostles also taught them to give continuing attention to the breaking of bread. This is an obvious reference to the Lord's supper, since there would be nothing remarkable about new Christians continuing to eat. Then, the twelve guided the new believers in prayer. Coffman writes, "Whereas in Judaism, prayers were offered at stated times of the day, the Christians offered prayers at any and all times, and in any and all places." Such holy living, combined with the miracles worked by the apostles, caused the surrounding community to be in awe (Acts 2:42-45).

Daily Occurrences In the Early Church

Those first converts were in the temple daily, likely for Bible study and worship. They also spent time together on a daily basis, as "breaking bread from house to house" would seem to indicate. Their daily partaking of food was done out of hearts filled with "extreme joy" (Thayer) and simplicity, which Lenski says is a noun "derived from an adjective which means 'without a stone,' hence perfectly smooth and even, metaphorically, a condition that is undisturbed by anything contrary." Thus, those early Christians praised God for the forgiveness of sins and the community of believers of which he had made them a part. The other folks who lived in Jerusalem found them to be an acceptable group.

Seemingly as a direct result of their daily activities, Luke goes on to say, "And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:46-47). It is important to realize the Lord is the one responsible for bringing forth fruit. Too many have been too quick to take credit for growth in the church,

while often blaming others when there is no growth. Paul said, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase" (1 Corinthians 3:6-7). Like those early Christians, today's followers of the Lord need to give themselves over to daily study, sharing, meeting together and hearts filled with extreme joy and simplicity. The results might well be daily conversions because we will have once again turned our lives over to the Lord.

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss what it is that convicts men of sin and moves them to obedience.
2. What keys to the kingdom did Peter use on the day of Pentecost?
3. Who were the recipients of the gift of the Holy Spirit and what might it be?
4. To what things did the first Christians give constant attention?
5. What does Luke say happened daily? Discuss the possible relationship between these daily occurrences.

Lesson 6

A Miracle at the Temple

Acts 3

The Lame Man at the Beautiful Gate

Peter and John, who once had been partners in the fishing business, are depicted by Luke as going to the temple at the ninth hour, which was one of the hours of prayer. There were at least 2, and some say 3, hours of prayer during a given day. The first was at 9 a.m. and the second 3 p.m., or the third and ninth hours of the day. The apostles may have gone up to the temple at the ninth hour both to pray and to have an opportunity to speak to others about Jesus.

No matter what their purpose, an encounter with a man who had been lame since the time of his birth, more than forty years previous to the time of this occurrence (4:22), gave them a wonderful occasion to preach the gospel. The lame man was lain each day at the temple gate, which was called Beautiful, to ask alms from those entering in to pray (Acts 3:1-2). Josephus seems to be describing this gate in Book 5 chapter 5:3 of *Wars of the Jews*, when he says, "its height was fifty cubits; and its doors were forty cubits; and it was adorned after a most costly manner, as having much richer and thicker plates of silver and gold upon them than the other." The other gates were all just 30 cubits, or 45' high.

"What I Do Have I Give You"

As Peter and John approached him, the lame man asked them to give him alms. Both apostles looked at him and Peter asked him to look at them. The beggar turned expecting to receive some money, but Peter immediately informed him they did not have silver nor gold. Imagine the disappointment the lame man must have felt when he heard those words. However, that low was turned into an emotional high when Peter healed him under the authority of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. When Peter pulled him up by his right hand, the lame man felt strength come into his ankles and went walking, leaping and praising God into the temple.

It should be observed that the lame man expressed no faith in the apostles' ability to heal him. In fact, he only asked them for money. As Luke records it, the lame man did not even try to stand up, but was pulled to his feet. Also, it is good to note that the miracle was undeniable. Everyone recognized this man as the lame man who had daily lain at the Beautiful gate begging for alms. They were amazed that they now saw the formerly lame man standing before them. Some within the audience may well have thought of Isaiah 35:6, which refers to the future glory of Zion by saying, "Then the lame shall leap like a deer, And the tongue of the dumb sing. For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, And streams in the desert" (Acts 3:3-10).

Preaching In Solomon's Porch

With the now healed lame man holding onto each of them, it was natural that a crowd would gather around Peter and John. Peter, empowered by the Holy Spirit to speak, seized the opportunity to preach about the great healer, Jesus. The crowd looked at them as if they had somehow worked this miracle, but Peter

instantly turned their attention to "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers," and the glorified Jesus, His Son. They had delivered, denied and killed the "Prince of life." God, in his turn, had raised him from the dead, a fact which Peter and John had personally witnessed (Acts 3:11-15).

The lame man had been healed in the authority of Jesus. Because of the apostles' complete faith in their Lord's ability to make men whole, a great miracle had been performed. The recognition of that miracle by those Jews now gathered around Peter and John would have forced them to recognize Jesus as King. Further, many would have readily seen that meant they had crucified God's Anointed. Peter says they did what they did because they did not fully understand. He also noted everything followed the precise plan God had laid out so long before the events took place (Acts 3:16-18).

A Call To Repentance

On the basis of the great miracle worked in their midst and the undeniable fact of Christ's resurrection, Peter appealed to the multitude to turn from their sinful lives and be converted, or transformed. A simple comparison of this verse with Peter's statements in Acts 2:38 reveals that conversion takes place in the waters of baptism. Since one coming up out of the watery grave is made to walk in newness of life, it would certainly be reasonable to call the effects of baptism a conversion. Further, the transformation comes in the form of the sins of the obedient one being erased (Acts 3:19; Romans 6:3-11).

On Pentecost, Peter said those following his instructions would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, described here as "times of refreshing," which would certainly be the result of receiving the Comforter. The Holy Spirit had Peter go on to say that when Jesus' work in salvation was completed, then God would send Jesus again to reclaim his own. Until that time when salvation was fully accomplished, as the prophets had foretold, Peter said Jesus would remain in heaven. Of course, those who refused God's saving grace will be punished, as Moses said (Acts 3:20-23; Deuteronomy 18:15-19).

As children of Israel, those in Peter's audience should have been aware of the numerous prophecies about the coming Messiah, from Samuel through John (2 Samuel 7:12-16). They had benefitted from God's covenant with Abraham and should also have been familiar with the promise that the whole world would be blessed through the seed of Abraham. Paul told the Galatian brethren this specifically referred to one son of Abraham, Jesus (Acts 3:24-25; Galatians 3:16). The Jews, or sons of Abraham were the first to hear the gospel, just as Christ commanded (Luke 24:46-48; Romans 1:16). Jesus had come, not to restore a physical kingdom to Israel, but to bring salvation from sin. The fact that the Jews were to be the first to hear the gospel clearly implies others would also hear in the future. We know this same apostle, Peter, would play a significant role in the beginning of that proclamation too (Acts 3:26).

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you suppose the apostles went to the temple at the hour of prayer? Do you see any special lessons for us in their actions?
2. What specific points do you observe in the miracle of the healing of the lame man?
3. Contrast the words used to describe the Jews treatment of Jesus with that of God.
4. Discuss the meaning of "repent," "be converted," "sins may be blotted out" and "times of refreshing."
5. Discuss Peter's use of prophesy and some of the various prophetic statements he used in this sermon.

Lesson 7

Two Apostles Arrested!

Acts 4:1-31

Peter and John Arrested

While they were still preaching, armed men came into the temple area and arrested Peter and John. This group included priests, the captain of the temple and the Sadducees. In a footnote, F. F. Bruce said the captain of the temple, "belonged to one of the chief-priestly families, and in the temple he ranked next to the high priest. The temple guard which he commanded was a picked body of Levites. (It was from this body, presumably, that sentries were detailed to guard the tomb of Jesus, Matt. 27:65ff.)" Coffman described the Sadducees as

...proud, secular materialists who denied the existence of a spiritual world, holding that neither angels nor demons existed, denying any such thing as the resurrection, and rejecting the OT scriptures, except for parts of them which had political utility, and also refusing the traditions of the elders. Through wealth and political power they had gained control of the religious apparatus which ran the temple, the office of the high priest being regularly filled from this group.

Luke tells us the apostles were arrested because they taught the people and preached the resurrection by preaching about Jesus.

One might well marvel at the fact that the Pharisees, who had so often challenged Jesus while he walked the earth, were not specifically mentioned by Luke as being in the group which took Peter and John prisoner. Perhaps this was because the apostles were teaching the resurrection, in which the Pharisees believed. In fact, Acts often presents the Pharisees as being sympathetic to the church and even obeying the gospel (5:34-40; 15:5; 23:6-9; 26:4-5).

It was now evening, Peter and John apparently having preached for nearly three hours (compare 3:1), so they held them in jail until the next day. If this was to be a criminal case, the Sanhedrin could not try it at night (Walter M. Chandler, *The Trial of Jesus*, p. 137). Despite their arrest, God caused the preaching of the gospel to bring forth fruit, as Luke reports the number of men who believed came to about 5,000 (Acts 4:1-4). The word "believed" is a synecdoche for full obedience to the gospel.

Their Day In Court

Luke's description makes it clear that Peter and John were brought before the Jewish Sanhedrin the next day. Ash says, "It was the high court of seventy members, plus **the high priest**, that oversaw matters concerned with the temple and its worship. It was, in fact, the chief political force among the Jews. Most were Sadducees." He went on to note that the scribes were students of the law, including most of the Pharisees on the council. Annas had been, Caiaphas was and, it appears, John was to be the High Priest (Luke 3:2). So, the incident in the temple was taken very seriously. Significantly, they did not question whether or not the miracle took place, but under whose authority it was performed. Ash observes that the Greek indicates they actually asked how men like them could have

done such a thing.

Peter, "filled with the Holy Spirit," answered with a succinct defense of Jesus' power as the resurrected Lord (compare Matthew 10:17-19). It was through Jesus, the one they rejected and crucified, that the man was made well, or saved, and Peter wanted the council and all of Israel to know that profound truth. Then, quoting from Psalm 118:22, to show that the Sanhedrin, as the religious builders, had rejected the very stone which was chosen by God to be the head of the corner (see Matthew 21:42; 1 Peter 2:4-6). Then, the inspired apostle went on to state that anyone who would ever receive spiritual healing, or salvation, would do so under the authority of Jesus Christ (Acts 4:5-12).

Commanded To Speak No More Under Jesus' Authority

It was obvious to those in the council that Peter and John had not been trained by the rabbis or with the scribes, yet they dared to interpret scripture with great boldness. Either because of their boldness, their use of scripture, their general demeanor, or some other factor, the council noted "they had been with Jesus." All Christians ought to strive to live so that a similar observation can be made about them. Also, and perhaps most damaging of all, the council could not refute the miracle because the formerly lame man stood before them healed!

The apostles were asked to step outside while the council conferred. They could not deny a miracle had been worked because reports of the healing were wide spread. Neither were they able to refute Peter's arguments for the resurrection of Jesus, but they needed to stop the preaching of Jesus before more of the people turned to follow him. So, they called the apostles back in, threatened them and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:13-18). Boles says, "The original conveys the idea that they were not to let the name of Jesus pass their lips again. They severely threatened them and charged them that they were not to use 'the name of Jesus' at all."

Compelled to Preach

Peter and John made it clear that in their view the Sanhedrin had no authority to countermand a command from God. Further, they felt compelled, by the power of the things they had witnessed, to proclaim to all the good news. Because the miracle was such common knowledge and had caused so many to glorify God, the council had no other recourse but to let the apostles go without any further punishment. They simply added a few more threats and let them go rather than risk the people taking the apostles' side (compare Mark 12:12). After all, a man who had been lame forty years was now walking (Acts 4:19-22)!

Upon their release, Peter and John went back to their companions and related the whole story of their arrest and the words of the council. The entire group lifted up their voices in praise to the Almighty Creator. Their expression of praise included a recognition of God's providential working in the death of Jesus. Then, they asked the Father to give them all the strength to preach the truth in spite of the threats of the Sanhedrin. Additionally, they asked that God continue to work miracles through them which would clearly demonstrate the authority of Jesus Christ the Lord. Immediately, the place where they were gathered was shaken, they were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to preach the word with boldness (Acts 4:23-31).

Discussion Questions

1. Describe the Sanhedrin in the days of Theophilus and the apostles.
2. How did Peter and John react to being brought before the council? Explain why you believe they were able to respond in such a fashion.
3. What was the council's reaction to their defense? Why do you think they reacted as they did?
4. Why did Peter say they could not obey the council? Under what circumstances might it be right to disobey the law?
5. What types of persecution do Christians face today? What lessons can we learn from the apostles' approach to that which they faced?

Lesson 8

Growth Through Discipline!

Acts 4:32-5:16

Sharing Blessings

Perhaps because Peter and John had overcome this first threatening act of the religious leaders, the church was united. Early Christian unity is very evident in the way they readily shared what they had with their fellow believers. Note, this was voluntary and not forced upon them by some governmental or church order. Instead, each Christian thought of his blessings as gifts from God to be used to the benefit of all the brethren. Interestingly, the generosity of individual members served to enhance the power of the apostles' preaching of the resurrection gospel (Acts 4:32-33).

In spite of the teachings of some, it cannot be shown that the church was a commune or that the apostles had control of everyone's property. Yet, individual believers sold land and brought the money to the apostles to be distributed as needed among the family of God. Apparently, Joses, or Joseph, was so well known for such acts of kindness and encouragement, that he was nicknamed Barnabas, or son of consolation, by the apostles (Acts 4:34-37).

Lying to the Holy Spirit

Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, sold a piece of land, but decided to only lay a portion of the proceeds at the feet of the apostles. Ash notes that the same word translated "kept back," is used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament in Joshua 7:1 when describing the sin of Achan in taking of the accursed thing. Both instances seem to have arisen because of greed. Peter said Satan had filled their hearts to lie to the Holy Spirit. Because the apostles were inspired by the Holy Spirit, pretending to give all the money from the sale of the land to the apostles was tantamount to lying to the Spirit. Coffman actually says this event threatened the credibility of the apostles' speech. Since they claimed to be speaking through the Spirit, failure to see through this ruse would have brought their word into question. The amount of the gift was not the problem, as Peter said, the land was theirs to do with as they pleased. The problem arose when they tried to deceive God as to the size of the gift. Ananias, upon hearing Peter's words, fell down dead. This resulted in great fear coming upon all who heard about the incident. Young men wrapped Ananias' body and took it out to be buried (Acts 5:1-6).

Three hours later, an unsuspecting Sapphira also came before Peter. He asked her if they had sold the land for the amount Ananias had laid at the apostles' feet. When she said that the amount named was correct, Peter knew they had conspired to deceive or, as he said, test the "Spirit of the Lord," who is also described in this story as the Holy Spirit and God (see Acts 5:3-4). He asked her why they had taken this action and told her the men who had buried her husband's body would also bury her. Sapphira fell down at Peter's feet, died and was carried out by the same young men to be buried beside her husband. This awe inspiring event moved the church, or called out, and any others who heard the report to fear. Not only the deaths, but also God's ability to know the intents of the hearts of the conspiring couple ought to cause anyone to think twice before trying to deceive God (Acts 5:7-11).

More Miracles

God continued to work miracles through the inspired apostles. The united church continued to assemble on Solomon's porch. Though those outside of the church had been moved to fear, they did not dare to join the number of believers. However, they did hold the Christians in high esteem and increasing numbers of those who believed on Jesus were added to the Lord. Significantly, those believers were both men and women. Remember, there is no difference between men and women in Christ, all can find salvation (Galatians 3:26-29).

People were so impressed with the way God worked through the apostles that they brought their sick out into the streets. In this way, Peter could see them and stop to heal them as he passed by, or, at least, his shadow would fall on them. Whether they were actually healed by the shadow of Peter passing over them, one cannot tell from the text. Others even came from surrounding towns bringing those who were sick or possessed by an evil spirit. All were healed by the power of God working through the apostles (Acts 5:12-16).

Discussion Questions

1. Describe the caring relationship that existed in the early church. What could we do to cultivate the same relationship today?
2. What special name did the apostles give Joses? What nickname would you like people to apply to you? What are you doing to encourage people to think that way?
3. Explain what the sin of Ananias and Sapphira was.
4. What was the relationship between the apostles and the Holy Spirit? What things happened to Ananias and Sapphira and afterwards which show that to be the case?
5. What can we learn about church growth from these events?

Lesson 9

The Apostles Before the Sanhedrin

Acts 5:17-42

The Apostles Imprisoned

Seeing the high regard the apostles were held in by the people and knowing the number being added to the church moved the high priest and the Sadducees to jealousy. They caused the apostles to be seized and placed in common prison. After all, the apostles, despite an earlier warning, had continued preaching in the name of Jesus. Their ongoing proclamation of the resurrection was totally contrary to the teaching of the Sadducees. But, God is more powerful than any earthly authority. He sent a messenger to release the apostles and command them to go to the temple and preach the words which give eternal life.

Around daybreak, the apostles were in the temple preaching. At roughly the same time, the high priest called for the council to assemble. Luke described the council as a senate, probably because Theophilus would have been more familiar with that word's meaning. The high priest also sent to the prison to have the apostles brought to the meeting of the assembled council. However, the officers soon came back to report they found the jail secure and all the guards in place but no apostles. Despite such a clear sign that God was with the apostles, the high priest and those allied with him wondered what would happen (Acts 5:17-24).

Before the Council

It must have been a shock for the council to learn that the men they had charged not to preach in the name of Jesus were, even as they met, preaching in the temple. The captain and his officers brought them back without violence because they feared the common people, who sympathized with the apostles, would stone them. The high priest asked the apostles why they continued to preach in the name in which they had been strictly told not to preach. Coffman notes they would not even speak Jesus' name because of the great hatred they had for him and all for which he stood. When our Lord was crucified, they, with the mob, had been very willing to have the blood of Jesus on their hands, but now they expressed shock that the apostles would portray them as responsible parties in his death (Acts 5:25-28; Matthew 27:25).

The answer of Peter and the other apostles carries profound implications for each generation of Christians. "We ought to obey God rather than men." Clearly, no law was considered by the apostles to be above God's law. After all, the limit of the Sadducees authority could be seen in the fact that they had crucified Jesus and God had raised him up from the grave. Further, the apostles said God had now seated Jesus on the throne as ruler and savior. The Lord had been empowered by his Father to give repentance leading to the forgiveness of sins to all of Israel. The twelve stood as witnesses of God's working and the Holy Spirit confirmed the truthfulness of the events they related through the miracles he enabled them to perform (Acts 5:29-32).

Gamaliel's Counsel

Peter's words accusing the council of murdering Jesus enraged them to the point of being prepared to murder the apostles as well.

But they could take no such action without the support of the Pharisaic members of the court. The Pharisees were in the minority, but they commanded much more popular respect than the Sadducees did, so much so that the Sadducean members of the Sanhedrin found it impolitic to oppose the Pharisees demands. This was particularly important in a case like the present, where the defendants enjoyed the people's good will (Bruce, pp. 123-124).

So, when Gamaliel, a highly respected teacher from among the Pharisees, rose to speak and asked for the apostles to be put outside, his words were instantly heeded.

Gamaliel warned the council against the actions they were contemplating. He reminded them of a man named Theudas who had claimed to be someone special and led four hundred men in a rebellion. He had been killed and those following him scattered, with the rebellion coming to nothing. Another man, named Judas of Galilee, also rose up during the time of a census and caused a number of people to follow him, but he was killed and his followers similarly scattered.

Gamaliel urged the council to leave the apostles alone. He reasoned that if their work was of their own creation, it would come to nothing. However, if their actions were truly directed by God, the council could not stop them and they would be found in the unenviable position of opposing the Almighty (Acts 5:33-39).

The Council Actions and the Apostles' Response

Having accepted Gamaliel's council as good advice, the council called for the apostles to be brought back into their chambers. They had them beaten and "commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus." Then, they released them. The response of the apostles to being beaten and coming so close to being killed is remarkable. They rejoiced "that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name." Perhaps that is, in part, because they knew how much Jesus had suffered for them on Calvary and they felt that this was a small thing to do in contrast to such a great act of love. Peter certainly saw it as a sign that the Spirit of God was with the one suffering and God's name would be glorified (1 Peter 4:14-16). So, every day the apostles continued to teach Jesus as God's anointed in the temple and from house to house (Acts 5:40-42).

Discussion Questions

1. What motive was behind the apostles' arrest? How did God respond?
2. Where did the council find the apostles the second time and what instructions did they give the captain and his men?
3. Describe the high priest's question and the apostles' response. Under what conditions should we respond similarly?
4. Explain fully who Gamaliel was, the nature of his advice and how the council reacted.
5. What did the council do with the apostles? How did they react? Why?

Lesson 10

Handling Trouble in the Church

Acts 6:1-14

Widows Among the Hellenists Neglected

Earlier, Luke told Theophilus that various ones sold some of their possessions and laid the money at the feet of the apostles. He further reported that the money was distributed among the brethren according to need. Now, Luke reports that a complaint arose among the Hellenists, who likely were converts from among the Jews who had been scattered throughout the world and now spoke Greek and followed the customs of those using the same language. They felt their widows were not being cared for as well as the widows of the Hebrews, or those who spoke Aramaic, in the daily distribution, or serving of tables. Whether the charge resulted through an accidental or intentional oversight is not known. However, the perceived problem obviously threatened the peace and unity of the young church (Acts 6:1).

The Apostles' Solution

The apostles said it was not appropriate for them to cease devoting their full energies to the word in order to serve tables. Instead, the apostles directed the members of the congregation to look among their own number to find seven men qualified to carry out this important task. It is always good for men who will manage monetary affairs or hold positions of authority to be selected by the people they will serve. The men chosen had to be men who were known among the brethren as good men. They had to be full of the Holy Spirit, which may have meant they had to possess miraculous gifts or it may simply have referred to their fully displaying the fruits of the Spirit. This writer believes the latter was intended. Of course, they also would need "skill in the management of affairs," which Thayer says is the definition of "wisdom." The apostles planned to appoint the seven selected to attend to this important matter. Meanwhile, they planned to continue to focus on prayer and ministering to others with the word of God (Acts 6:2-4; Galatians 5:22-26).

Since that solution sounded good to all concerned, the whole multitude of believers set about the task of selecting men so qualified. They chose Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, who, Luke tells us, was a proselyte from Antioch. The seven were then brought before the apostles who laid their hands on them after going to God in prayer. It is always good to approach God about any matter Christians are about to undertake and especially when church problems are involved. The laying on of the apostles hands surely placed the seven officially in office, much like swearing in a new president, and may have actually involved bestowing on them miraculous gifts. Handling the problem in such a way resulted in further growth in the church through the spreading of the word of God. In fact, the number of Christ's followers was multiplied. Luke even told Theophilus that a large number of priests obeyed the faith (Acts 6:5-7).

One of the Seven, Stephen, Accused of Blasphemy

The record of great miracles being wrought by Stephen is the first such by anyone other than an apostle. It should be noted that such was not accomplished without a laying on of the apostles' hands. The miracles attracted the attention of the members of a synagogue which was comprised of people from among the Freedmen, or freed slaves. These came from various cities outside of Palestine. Since Cilicia, where Tarsus is located, is specifically mentioned, it may be that Paul attended this synagogue. Some confronted Stephen and began to debate with him concerning his teaching. They could not, however, refute the wisdom of Stephen's arguments, since it came from the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:8-10).

So, they bribed certain men to accuse Stephen of blasphemy, specifically, speaking against God's words as delivered by Moses. The aroused multitude, along with the elders and scribes, captured him and took him before the council. The false witnesses went so far as to say that Stephen said Jesus would destroy the temple. In actuality, our Lord had said the religious leaders of his day would destroy the temple of his body, which would then be raised up in three days. Too, the change in God's covenant was foretold by the Almighty through his prophets (Acts 6:11-14; Jeremiah 31:31-34).

Discussion Questions

1. What problem arose in the church? What dangers might have come out of it?
2. Why did the apostles not handle the problem themselves?
3. What qualifications were given for the men to be selected? Why do you suppose these qualifications were needed? Who was involved in the selection?
4. How did the solution impact the church?
5. How did Stephen's debate go with the Freedmen? Why? What did they do next?

Lesson 11

Stephen's Sermon

Acts 6:15-7:60

A Face Like an Angel

Perhaps Paul reported to Luke the remarkable appearance of the face of Stephen. Luke told Theophilus that those in the council saw Stephen's face "as the face of an angel." The closest thing to this experience is found in Exodus 34:29-35 which reports that Moses' face shone after he had been with the Lord to the point that people could not look directly at him. Despite Stephen's appearance, the high priest asked him if the accusations of blasphemy, which had been brought against him, were true (Acts 6:15-7:1).

This man, full of faith, power, wisdom and the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:3, 8), directed his answer toward a history of God's dealings with Abraham and his children. It seems significant that a man accused of blasphemy would begin his defense by talking about the "God of glory." He reminded the council of Abraham's call to leave the country of his people, which was first received in Ur of the Chaldees and renewed in Haran after his father's death. As Stephen noted, Abraham then moved, under God's direction, to the land of Canaan (Acts 7:2-4; Genesis 12:1-9).

Though God did not give Abraham an inheritance in the promised land, he did promise to give him a son and to give the land of Canaan to his descendants. Stephen also said God told the father of the faithful his children's children would be held in bondage in Egypt for four hundred years. The actual length of their stay in Egypt was 430 years, but Stephen rounded off to 400, just as God had in Genesis 15:13. He continued his speech by noting how God told Abraham he would judge the nation of Egypt and bring his people out to serve him in the land of promise at the end of the appointed time. Ash notes Stephen mentioned God judges all those who oppose him, which is a good observation for those members of the council who were at that time questioning him. After making those significant promises, God instituted circumcision as a part sign of the covenant between Abraham and his descendants (Acts 7:5-8; Exodus 12:40-41; Genesis 17:9-14).

Life In Egypt

Abraham's great-grandson, Joseph, was sold into Egypt because of the jealousy of his own brothers. Coffman sees this incident as prefiguring the rejection of God's intended deliverer on the cross of Calvary. But God, in his providence, noted Joseph's mistreatment and delivered him. He went on to make him governor over the land of Egypt. A great famine left Jacob and his household without food to sustain them. So, having heard of the plentiful food in Egypt, he sent his sons to purchase grain on two separate occasions. On the second, Joseph revealed his identity to his brethren and let Pharaoh know who they were.

Joseph, with the approval of Pharaoh, sent wagons to bring his aged father to Egypt. Seventy-five souls left Canaan for the land of Egypt. Jacob's body was carried back to Shechem to be laid in the cave of Machpelah alongside those of Abraham and Sarah. God had not forgotten his promise to Abraham and as days passed, the children of Israel multiplied from the original seventy-five until they appeared to be a menace to the Egyptians. Additionally, a king ascended to

the throne who did not recall the salvation of Egypt by the hand of Joseph. The king mistreated them by placing them in bondage and slaying their babies (Acts 7:9-19).

Moses' Rejection By God's People

Into such a climate, Moses was born, a child particularly pleasing to God. He was hidden by his parents for three months. Afterward, God caused him to be found by Pharaoh's daughter and reared as if he were her own son. He was taught everything the Egyptians of his day knew. He was a strong man in word and deed. At the age of forty, he visited God's people. He killed an Egyptian who was mistreating one of his brethren. Stephen says he thought they would understand God intended to deliver them by his hand but had to flee when a Jew questioned his authority and revealed he knew of the Egyptian's death. He fled to Midian, where he married and had two sons (Acts 7:20-29).

When Moses was eighty, God spoke to him from a burning bush in the wilderness of Mount Sinai. God told him He had seen His people suffering in Egypt and heard their groaning. He told Moses that he would deliver the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage. Stephen reminded his listeners that God did deliver His people from Egyptian bondage, the Red Sea and forty years in the wilderness by the hands of the very one who the children of Israel had previously rejected (Acts 7:30-36).

Israel's Rebellion

That very deliverer was the one who foresaw the day God would raise up another prophet like him. Moses faithfully worked with those Jews who had been called out of bondage. Through him, they had heard God's living message. Yet, while Moses was receiving God's will on Mount Sinai, the people were rejecting that very will and turning back, at least in their hearts, toward Egypt. When they got Aaron to make the golden calf for them to worship, the people were effectively rejecting the Almighty. He, in turn, gave them up to serve worthless idols. Stephen quoted from Amos 5:25-27 to show their rejection was the reason they were led away into Babylonian captivity (Acts 7:37-43).

God's True House

The pattern for the making of the tabernacle was one of the things God revealed through Moses. Very clearly, Stephen noted that God intended for His pattern to be followed exactly (Hebrews 8:5). David, partly out of feelings of guilt aroused when he saw the splendor in which he lived in contrast to the simplicity of the tabernacle, wanted to build God a temple (1 Kings 8:17-18; 1 Chronicles 28:3). Of course, he was refused because he was a man of war. Instead, Solomon, David's son, was allowed to build a temple.

Yet, Stephen quickly went on to note that the Creator does not dwell in temples made with men's hands. Two quotes from Isaiah 66:1-2 and Psalm 102:25 clearly show He cannot be confined like the gods of the pagans (Acts 7:44-50; 1 Kings 8:27). Instead, the universe, which He made, is His throne!

Stephen Slain For Preaching the Truth

Like their fathers before them, Stephen accused the members of the council of having necks so rock hard that they could not bow before God. Though

they had been circumcised in the flesh, their hearts were still encased in sinful flesh. Just like their fathers before them had persecuted and killed those prophets who foretold the coming of God's Just One, Stephen said they had betrayed and murdered the Just One! He accused them of receiving God's will by the service of angels yet refused to keep it!

The truth cut into their hearts and they ground their teeth in rage at his words. The Lord's Spirit had inspired him to speak and now caused him to look intently into heaven. There he saw God's glory and Jesus standing at the Father's right hand. When he told the council what he saw, they cried out, stopped their ears, rushed to him, threw him outside of the city and stoned him. Luke notes those who stoned Stephen laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul (Acts 7:51-60).

Discussion Questions

1. Describe Abraham's faithful actions and God's rewards.
2. How was Joseph rejected? How did God use him?
3. How did God protect Moses and use him to deliver His people?
4. Describe the event Stephen saw as Israel's first rejection of God in their hearts.
5. Why do you suppose God insisted the tabernacle be made exactly by His pattern?
6. What accusations did Stephen bring against the council? How did they react?

Lesson 12

Philip, One of the Scattered Preachers

Acts 8:1-40

The Church Persecuted by Saul

Luke told Theophilus that Saul, by holding the coats of those who stoned Stephen, had given consent to his death. Immediately following this violent act, an intense period of persecution followed. The apostles remained in Jerusalem, but other disciples were driven to every corner of Judea and Samaria. God's providence can be seen in the safety of the apostles, who would have been the most visible leaders in the church. He can also be seen as working through the terrible acts of wicked men, who were persecuting the church, to spread the gospel over a broader territory.

Luke observed that "earnestly religious," or devout, men buried Stephen and greatly mourned his death. A couple of observations arise out of Luke's simple record. First, the brethren, or some God fearing men among the Jews, still had enough faith in God to openly bury a Christian who had died such a violent death for preaching the gospel. Second, the Sanhedrin must have recognized how wrong their actions were since their custom would not allow an individual grave and lamentation for one who had been judicially stoned.

Saul operated as the agent of an angry Sanhedrin which was intent upon wiping the church off the face of the globe. Boles thinks it probable that these events took place in A.D. 37.

„this was the year in which Tiberius died and Caligula succeeded him. There was a time when there was no Roman governor in Judea, and the Jewish factions reigned supreme. Hence, the opponents of Christianity visited Christian homes and thrust Christian men and women into vile prisons and then brought them before the elders in the synagogue, who tried to force them to deny Jesus; on their refusal some of them were put to death (Acts 22:4; 26:10), others were beaten (Acts 26:11), and all suffered many outrages (1 Tim. 1:13).

The church's response to the death of Stephen and the persecution which followed is both understandable and puzzling. The fact that Christians fled the area of Jerusalem and Judea is not surprising. However, that they preached the gospel wherever they went despite the trouble such preaching had given rise to is remarkable (Acts 8:1-4).

Philip Preaching in Samaria

Philip, who was one of the seven, went to the city of Samaria. Because the Samaritans were of mixed descent coming from the intermarriage of Jews and Gentiles, the Jews regarded them with contempt. The city of Samaria was built by Omri, a wicked king in Israel. It became the capital city for the ten tribes of the northern kingdom. Philip preached Jesus as the promised Messiah, a theme which would have been familiar to the Samaritans because of Deuteronomy 18:15-18.

The message hit home for multitudes of the Samaritans, especially because God confirmed it came from him by enabling Philip to work miracles. Sick, especially some who had been paralyzed and others who had been lame, were healed and demons were cast out of others. All of this caused the city to be filled with joy.

In Samaria, there was a man named Simon who had used magic and trickery to convince the people he was a spokesman for God. For quite some time, he held sway over the city in this fashion. However, when Philip preached the good news about Christ and his kingdom, with the accompanying signs, a large number of men and women believed and were baptized. Obviously, this verse makes it clear that preaching belief in Jesus and burial in his name is a crucial part of preaching about the kingdom. Even Simon, having been amazed by what he saw and heard, believed and was baptized (Acts 8:5-13).

Simon's Sin

When the apostles heard of the events in Samaria, they sent Peter and John to the city. Theophilus may well have remembered that John and his brother, James, had asked the Lord if they should call down fire out of heaven to destroy an uncooperative Samaritan city which had refused to receive the Lord (Luke 9:51-56). Now, he and Peter prayed for the Samaritans and laid hands on them that they might receive the miraculous gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-17).

Clear evidence of one's receiving of the miraculous gifts must have been present, since Simon was able to see this being accomplished through the laying on of the apostles' hands. It is evident from this text that Philip did not have the ability to bestow miraculous gifts on anyone. Also, it appears miraculous gifts were not given to all Christians in this, or any other, place. Simon had believed and been baptized, so there is no doubt he had been saved from his former sins (Mark 16:16). Yet, when confronted with a power potentially so useful in again dominating the city of Samaria, he reverted to a materialistic approach and tried to purchase the power from Peter and John.

Simon's attempt to purchase this power with money led Peter to tell Simon he and his money would perish together if his heart was not changed. He could have no part in matters eternal so long as his heart was not right with God. Notice, the apostle does not command him to repent of his sins, but "of this your wickedness," thereby indicating a single sin is involved. Peter also instructed Simon to pray God would forgive him, which is significantly different than his instructions to those who asked what to do on Pentecost.

Specifically, Simon had sinned by having the wrong thought in his heart, which caused him to be in a miserable condition. Lenski says, "As in Hebrews 12:15 the 'root of bitterness' means a root out of which bitter fruit grows, fruit which the Lord abominates, so here 'gall of bitterness' is that fruit." Thus, Simon's recently freed heart had again become bound by sin. Simon asked the apostles to pray to God for him, his actions thus foreshadowing the directions James would give the early church. When Peter and John had finished preaching the word of God in Samaria, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching in all the cities of Samaria along the way (Acts 8:18-25; James 5:16).

Preaching to the Ethiopian

At this point, Luke told Theophilus that Philip was directed by an angel of the Lord to go south to a place along the Jerusalem to Gaza road where no people lived. When an influential Ethiopian came along, the Spirit directed Philip to "go near and overtake this chariot." Luke also explained that this man was a eunuch serving under the great Queen Candace of the Ethiopians. He was in charge of all her treasury. He was on the road because he had been to Jerusalem to worship. While he was riding along, this Ethiopian was reading from Isaiah 53:7-8.

As Philip ran alongside the chariot, he asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" The official's question in return, "How can I, unless someone guides me?", indicates just how open his heart was. Philip accepted his invitation to sit with him in the chariot and answered his most important question, "I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?" Philip started proclaiming Jesus as the Christ from that very scripture. He must have preached baptism, since the Ethiopian nobleman asked, "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?" Though verse 37 is omitted from the most reliable texts, it is obvious from other scripture that one desiring the Lord to confess his name before the Father will confess Jesus before men (Matthew 10:32-33; Romans 10:9-10). After the eunuch commanded the chariot to stand still, both Philip and the Ethiopian went down into the water and Philip immersed him.

Immediately following their coming up out of the water, the Spirit caused Philip to be gone from the presence of the rejoicing eunuch. On his journey back to Caesarea, Philip preached in the coastal cities along the way. Specifically, Luke mentioned Azotus, or the ancient city of Ashdod (Acts 8:26-40).

Discussion Questions

1. How do the actions of the persecuted church differ from the actions of the church today?
2. What lessons can we learn from Philip's preaching in Samaria?
3. Describe the impartation of the miraculous gifts. Explain why you believe these are, or are not, being used today.
4. What lessons can we learn from the sin of Simon and the apostles' reaction?
5. What special qualities worthy of imitation are found in the Ethiopian? In Philip?

Lesson 13

Saul's Conversion and Peter's Works

Acts 9:1-43

Seeing the Light on the Damascus' Road

Saul not only persecuted the church in Jerusalem, but even went to foreign cities to carry out his vicious persecution. Bruce presents some evidence that the Jews had a treaty with the Romans which allowed them the privilege of extradition (1 Maccabees 15:15-21). It may have been under this right, to seek out any "pestilent fellows" that had fled from their country, that the high priest wrote letters to send with Saul to Damascus. Specifically, Saul was authorized to seek out those who followed "the Way," which was a means of designating those who followed Christ during Luke's day (Acts 16:17; 18:24-28; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22). When he found either men or women who followed that belief, he was authorized to take them in bonds to Jerusalem.

Saul's journey was interrupted by a great light coming down from heaven and shining around him. Since this occurred at midday, the light must have been very great. Saul fell to the ground and heard a voice asking him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" Naturally, he had to ask who was speaking. Then, he heard, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads." Clearly, the Lord was saying to persecute his followers is to persecute him. Knowing he had persecuted the followers of Jesus, Saul trembled and asked what he must do. The Lord said, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

Saul's travelling companions seem to have heard a sound but were unable to understand the words spoken (compare John 12:28-29; Acts 22:9). Though they all had fallen to the ground (Acts 26:14), they "stood," or existed, in a state of speechlessness. When Saul got up, he was blind, so his friends had to lead him by the hand into the city. For three days, he prayed and fasted, unwilling, or unable, to take food because of the tremendous shock he had received on the Damascus' road (Acts 9:1-9).

Saul Baptized by Ananias

Luke told Theophilus that "a certain disciple," not an apostle or preacher, saw a vision from the Lord. It must have been a shock for Ananias to hear the Lord tell him to go to Straight Street and ask for Saul of Tarsus. The Lord said Saul was praying and had seen, in a vision, a man named Ananias coming and putting his hand on him so that he might receive his sight. However, Ananias still hesitated because of all he knew about the persecution in Jerusalem and the letters Saul carried from the chief priests which gave him authority to bind any Christians he found in Damascus. The Lord informed him that Saul was specially chosen to take his name to the Gentiles, kings and the Jews. Coffman says Saul's purpose coincides directly with the prophecy of Isaiah 62:2.

Ananias called Saul "Brother," perhaps because they were both from fleshly Israel, or in anticipation of Saul's impending baptism which would result in

his being one of God's children in Christ. Saul's sight was miraculously restored through the laying on of Ananias' hands and, according to Acts 2:38, he received the gift of the Holy Spirit after he was baptized. Notice Saul was baptized immediately after receiving his sight (Acts 9:10-18).

The Persecutor Becomes a Preacher

Once he was baptized and had broken his fast by partaking of some food, Saul began to be with the disciples. Saul immediately began preaching in Damascus, then went to Arabia and returned to preach in Damascus again. Those who heard the former persecutor preach marvelled at his preaching. As he grew in strength, Saul successfully answered the challenge of the Jews and was able to prove Jesus is God's anointed and Son. Unable to refute his arguments, the Jews plotted to kill him. Somehow Saul learned of the plot and the brethren delivered him in a basket through the wall and outside the city.

When he arrived in Jerusalem, Saul was rejected by the disciples as a fellow believer. Barnabas took him to the apostles, which according to Galatians 1:18-19 may only refer to Peter and James, the Lord's brother. While with them, Saul told the story of his conversion and subsequent bold preaching in Damascus. Just as Stephen had done, Saul disputed with the Hellenists (compare Acts 6:8-9), and, just as with Stephen, they attempted to kill him. When the brethren discovered the plot, they sent him to Tarsus by way of Caesarea (Acts 9:19-30).

The Growth of the Church and Two of Peter's Miracles

After Saul went to Tarsus, Luke reported that a period of peace ensued during which the church in Judea, Galilee and Samaria was strengthened, walked in reverent respect for the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit. All of this resulted in a further multiplication of the number of disciples. During this time frame, Peter preached his way along the Mediterranean coast. The apostle healed a man named Aeneas who had been bedridden for eight years with palsy. Significantly, Peter told Aeneas that it was Jesus Christ who healed him. Those in his own city of Lydda, as well as the surrounding coastal plain of Sharon, who heard the news were also turned to Jesus.

Meanwhile, in Joppa, which was also reasonably close, a hard working, Christian woman, named Tabitha, or Dorcas, who was constantly giving to others, became ill and died. The brethren washed her body and laid it in an upper room. Then, they sent to Lydda to plead with Peter to come as soon as possible. When Peter came, they took him to the upper room where her body laid surrounded by weeping widows who showed him some of her beautiful works. Ash wonders aloud in his writings on this verse if the brethren intentionally failed to anoint her body for burial. Perhaps they were hoping the apostle would raise her from the dead!

Peter caused everyone to leave, kneeled down and prayed. Then, in much the same fashion as he had seen the Lord do, Peter called for Tabitha to arise. She opened her eyes and sat up upon seeing the apostle. He extended his hand to her and helped her up while calling for the brethren to come. Knowledge of this great miracle naturally spread and many believed on the name of the Lord. Peter stayed for a time in Joppa at the house of Simon the tanner. Evidently, he seized the opportunity to preach God's word to an area that had recently experienced two powerful examples of God's working (Acts 8:31-43).

Discussion Questions

1. Describe the events on the Damascus road.
2. What did the Lord tell Ananias to do? Why did he react as he did? What did he finally do?
3. Describe the actions of Saul when he was converted.
4. Tell about the two miracles Peter worked along the Mediterranean coast.
5. What types of works could people display at your death? Would these accomplishments make someone want you to be raised from the dead?

Lesson 14

Gentiles Welcomed Into the Kingdom

Acts 10:1-48

A God Fearing Gentile Is Directed to Seek the Truth

The city of Caesarea, according to Ash, was "an important seaport and the center of the Roman government and militia for the area. Both Greeks and Jews populated the city, often inharmoniously." Luke told Theophilus that in that city was a centurion, or commander of a hundred men, named Cornelius. He was of the Italian regiment, or cohort, which would have numbered between 600 and 1,000. The beloved physician described him as being devout, God fearing, one who gave generous gifts to those who might have been in need and prayed. Luke noted that his household also feared God, which was a way of describing one who believed in the God of Abraham but had refused to be circumcised.

At three in the afternoon, which was the ninth hour and a Jewish hour of prayer, an angel appeared to Cornelius in a vision. He reassured the frightened centurion by telling him God positively received his sacrifices. Then, as the ultimate proof of that acceptance, God directed that Cornelius send men to Joppa to call for Simon Peter at the house of a tanner named Simon. Immediately following the angel's departure, Cornelius dispatched two servants and a religious soldier to the city of Joppa (Acts 10:1-8).

Peter's Vision

On the next day at noon, while the emissaries were on their way, Peter went to the top of Simon's house to pray. He became very hungry while preparations for the noon meal were being made and fell into a trance. He saw something like a sheet being let down out of heaven full of all types of unclean animals and heard a voice telling him to kill and eat. Peter refused the instructions of the heavenly voice because he did not want to defile himself, as a Jew. The voice, in full agreement with the Lord's teachings in Mark 7:14-19, told Peter that nothing God had made should be described by man as common or unclean. The same vision was repeated three times and the sheet taken out of the apostle's sight.

As Peter thought about the vision, the men from Cornelius arrived at the house and began to inquire about him. The Holy Spirit told him to go with the three men who were looking for him because they were sent by the Spirit. Peter went down and told the men he was the man for whom they were looking. They told Peter that Cornelius had been told by God, through the agency of an angel, to send for Peter so that he could hear him preach. Realizing this message was from God, Peter invited them in to spend the night, apparently eating the very meal with them which had been being prepared while he saw the vision. The next morning, Peter and some other brethren set out for Caesarea (Acts 10:19-23).

Peter Meets Cornelius

The following day, Peter arrived at the house of Cornelius, where the God fearing soldier had assembled his kinsmen and friends to hear what God's messenger would say. Upon meeting the Lord's apostle, Cornelius bowed down before him. Rather than accepting such adoration or encouraging it in any way, Peter told Cornelius to get up because he too was a man (compare Acts 14:8-18; Revelation 19:10; 22:8-9). As they were talking, they entered the house and Peter saw a large group had assembled.

Peter's hospitality to the three messengers in Joppa suggests that he had already surmised God's intent for him to preach to the Gentiles. Perhaps it was for the sakes of those six witnesses who came with him that he started speaking as he did. Specifically, the apostle said he, as a Jew, was not allowed to go into the house of a Gentile. The words "one of another nation," according to Bruce and Ash, come from the word used in the Septuagint, or Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures, to designate an uncircumcised Philistine. In reality, a Jew could be in the company of Gentiles but such contact made them ceremonially unclean. However, Peter stated that God had shown him not to call any man common or unclean. So, Peter had come without objecting and now asked why they had sent for him.

Cornelius explained how, during a time of fasting and prayer, an angel had spoken to him. The angel had told him that God had heard his prayers and recognized the good he had done for those in need. He had been given specific details concerning how to send for Peter. The assembled group was prepared to hear whatever God had commanded the apostle to preach (Acts 10:24-33).

Peter Preached to the Assembled Gentiles

The beginning of Peter's sermon makes it obvious that he had learned a great new lesson. As Ash said, "Acceptability to **God** no longer depended on national descent, but upon character (cf. Amos 9:7; Micah 6:8). Thus one need not become a Jew to please **God**." So, he began to preach the simple gospel message he had already proclaimed to so many Jews. First, the Jews had learned Jesus was the means of man obtaining peace with God and his fellow man. To do that, Jesus had to be Lord, or master, over all. Peter presumed they had already heard of the preaching of Jesus which had spread through Judea and Galilee, beginning with the message of the forerunner, John the baptizer.

Jesus was God's anointed and had performed numerous acts of kindness and healing. Peter and the other apostles stood as witnesses of the good he did and the terrible trial the Jewish leaders put him through, followed by his death on the cross. They also could testify that God raised him up and made him known to certain witnesses, some of whom even ate with him. Those same were given a commission to testify that Jesus would ultimately judge both the living and dead. Even the prophets had referred to the coming Messiah through whom those believing on his name could receive the remission of their sins (Acts 10:34-43).

The Baptism of the Holy Spirit

A remarkable thing occurred while Peter was speaking. Gentiles, who had never gotten rid of their uncleanness through circumcision and sacrifice, were baptized with the Holy Spirit. The fact that they spoke in tongues and magnified the name of God was clear evidence that such a baptism had in fact taken place. Thus, God clearly showed that Gentiles could enter the church through baptism without first submitting to the requirements of the law of Moses. Peter drew the obvious conclusion and asked how anyone could forbid these Gentiles the opportunity to obey Christ by putting him on in baptism. After the entire group had

obeyed the Lord, they asked Peter and his companions to stay for a few days (Acts 10:44-48).

Discussion Questions

1. Give a thorough description of Cornelius.
2. How did God direct Cornelius? Peter?
3. Why do you think Peter reacted as he did to Cornelius bowing down? How did he learn of the purpose of his visit?
4. Why do you suppose the Holy Spirit fell on those in Cornelius' house before they were baptized?
5. What lessons about salvation can be learned from this story?

Lesson 15

More Contact With the Gentiles

Acts 11:1-30

Peter Explains His Actions

News of the events in Cornelius' house reached Jerusalem and the apostles, even, apparently, before Peter made his way back to the city. Prior to the baptism of Cornelius and his household, everyone who had been baptized had been subject to the law of Moses and circumcision, whether of fleshly Israel or proselytes. Luke told Theophilus of a dispute which arose from some of that number and Peter. They did not understand why he had gone into the house of a Gentile and actually eaten there.

Peter's answer teaches us a great deal about resolving controversy within the church. He defended his actions by saying they were authorized and approved by God. Specifically, he had seen a vision which indicated to him that he should no longer regard any other man as common and heard the Spirit tell him to go with the three men who had been sent from Caesarea. The apostle went, accompanied by six other brethren. Next, Peter related the story of the vision Cornelius had directing him to send for Peter so that he could hear words that would save him and his household. It is clear that salvation was to be theirs only after they had heard and obeyed the words spoken.

Then, Peter reported that "the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning." No doubt this is a reference to the day of Pentecost when the apostles were baptized with the Holy Spirit and spoke in other languages. So, Peter did not feel he could oppose God by refusing to baptize, or in any other way place stiffer requirements on, these Gentiles. Peter's arguments convinced all assembled that the Gentiles had also been given the right to eternal life if they would submit to the Savior in penitent baptism (Acts 11:1-18).

Barnabas Goes to Antioch to Encourage Young Converts

Ash reports that Antioch was the world's third largest city at that time, trailing only Rome and Alexandria. Luke reported that those scattered by the persecution at the time of Stephen's death went over a large area preaching the word, but only to Jews. However, the men of Cyprus and Cyrene preached the gospel to Gentiles in Antioch as well. That the Lord was with them could not be denied by anyone since a large number "believed and turned to the Lord."

When word of the events in Antioch reached the church in Jerusalem, they sent Barnabas. He encouraged all the young followers of the Lord to commit themselves to the Lord. The goodness of Barnabas, coupled with his faith and the workings of the Holy Spirit had the further effect of a great many more people being added to the church. He then went to Tarsus to bring Paul back to help in this rich work. Together, they worked with the church in Antioch for a year and were able to teach a large number of people. The disciples, or learners, in the city of Antioch were the first to wear the name Christian. This seems to be the

fulfillment of God's promise to give his people a new name after Gentiles had seen God's righteousness and kings had seen his glory (Acts 11:19-26; Isaiah 62:2). How appropriate that they would now be designated as followers of the Christ, or anointed King (compare Acts 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16).

The Gentiles Help Starving Christians in Judea

Certain prophets, or men who had received a miraculous gift which allowed them to speak for God, came from Jerusalem to Antioch. Agabus, one of that number, stood up and told the church a great famine was coming. Luke reported that the prophecy was fulfilled in the days of Claudius, which would place the event around 44-48 A. D. Each Christian, as he was able, gave to send relief to the brethren still living in the area around Jerusalem. It was agreed that the collection would be taken to the elders in Jerusalem to be distributed to any Christian in need. It seems significant that the money was taken to the elders and not the apostles or the seven (Acts 11:27-30).

Discussion Questions

1. What troubling question came out of the baptism of Cornelius' house? Who asked the question? Why do you suppose they asked?
2. What facts did Peter present in defense of his actions?
3. What can we learn from this incident about resolving conflict in the church?
4. What happened in Antioch and what role did Barnabas play there?
5. How did the name Christian first come to be used in reference to members of the church? Why do you think it was used?
6. What did Agabus say would happen? How did the Christians in Antioch respond? In what situations might we do the same?

Lesson 16

Herod Agrippa and the Church

Acts 12:1-24

James Killed and Peter Seized By Herod

Sometime near the time Barnabas and Saul were taking the gift from Antioch to Jerusalem, Herod Agrippa decided to inflict pain on certain members of the church. Particularly, it seems, he had in mind the apostles. He first had James, John's brother, taken captive and killed with the sword. James' death must have occurred somewhere near 44 A. D., since that is the year Herod Agrippa the First died.

Once Herod saw the political impact of that action, he immediately had Peter imprisoned, intending to put him to death as well. He had Peter arrested about the time of the celebration of the Passover feast, which lasted for some eight days. While he waited for the conclusion of Passover, Herod had sixteen soldiers, divided into four groups of four, to watch the apostle in the prison. He planned to publicly execute Peter on the conclusion of the feast. It seems likely Peter thought of another Passover and the death of his Lord while he waited in prison (Acts 12:1-4).

The Danger of Prayer

While Herod waited for the end of Passover, the church waited in prayer. They asked God to be with Peter, whether in simply requesting that God help sustain his faith or have him released, cannot be said with assurance. The Greek words used by Luke suggest there was a prayer being offered up around the clock. The night before Herod intended to call for Peter, the apostle lay chained to two soldiers with two more outside the door. One of the Lord's angelic messengers awakened him and caused the chains to fall off his hands. Then, he told him to dress and led him out of the prison. Peter did not think any of this was real, but thought he was dreaming. The apostle followed the angel past the first and second guard posts, through the gate, which seemed to open automatically, and out into the street.

Once he was in the street, Peter finally realized he was free! The awestruck apostle now saw that the Lord had sent his messenger to deliver him out of the murderous hands of Herod. After thinking for a moment, Peter went to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, to tell the church of his miraculous release. A girl named Rhoda recognized the voice of the apostle at the gate. In her excitement, she did not let him in but went to inform the others in the house that Peter was outside. At first, they thought she was crazy. Then, they thought she had heard Peter's angel.

Finally, the apostle's insistent knocking caused them to go see for themselves. They were amazed at what they saw, despite the fact that they had been praying to God in Peter's behalf for days. Herein lies the danger of prayer, God may give you that for which you have been asking! Peter related the story of his deliverance by the Lord. Then, he told them to inform James and the brethren and he departed (Acts 12:5-17).

God Deals With Herod

The next morning, as one might imagine, the prison was in turmoil. No one knew what had happened to Peter. When Herod could not find him, he had the guards executed. Roman law required that a guard face the punishment which was intended for any prisoner who escaped under their watch (compare Acts 16:27; 27:42-44). Not long after, Herod left Jerusalem and went to Caesarea, his other capital.

Bruce says the cities of "Tyre and Sidon, depended on Galilee for their food supply, as they had done in the days of Hiram and Solomon (cf. 1 Kings 5:9ff.)." Once they realized they had offended Herod, they set out to make things right. They somehow got close to Herod's personal aide, Blastus, and through him asked for peace. Josephus says Herod set aside some days to honor Caesar, perhaps on his birthday which was May 1. On the second day, Herod went into a theatre where a large group of people were assembled. The early morning sun reflected brightly off his garment, which Josephus says was totally made of silver.

When Herod was seated on the throne, the people began to praise him as a god. Herod did not stop the proceedings and the Lord caused his angel to strike him because he did not give glory to God. It would be good to note that others were careful to turn aside worship which rightfully only belongs to God (Acts 10:25-26; 14:8-18; Revelation 19:10). Josephus said Herod suffered severe stomach pains and a horrible, lingering death which took five days. Luke reports that he was eaten by worms. Interestingly, despite all the attacks of men and failure to give God the glory which belongs to him, God's word still grew and multiplied (Acts 12:18-24).

Discussion Questions

1. What action did Herod take against the church? What do you think motivated him?
2. Describe Herod's further actions. What did the church do in response?
3. How did the church respond to its answered prayers? Why do you think they responded as they did?
4. What did God do to Herod? Why?
5. List lessons those in the church today can glean from these incidents.

Lesson 17

Barnabas and Saul Called to Work

Acts 12:25-13:52

Barnabas' and Saul's Special Work

Once Barnabas and Saul had completed their task of delivering the gift for the needy saints in Jerusalem, they returned to Antioch. Barnabas' cousin, John Mark, also went with them (Colossians 4:10). It will be remembered that Mark's mother was Mary. Luke had just reported that the church met in her house for prayers while Peter was in prison. It is even possible her house was used as a resting place during Barnabas' Saul's stay in Jerusalem.

The church in Antioch was blessed with inspired men who delivered God's word, or prophets, and teachers. Among that number were: Barnabas, the son of consolation, Simeon, whose nickname was "black," Lucius, who was somehow closely associated with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As these men were carrying out their various ministries for the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit called for Barnabas and Saul to be set apart for their specially chosen work. Apparently the whole church fasted and prayed as they sent them on their way. The laying on of hands did not impart any special gift but was a sign of the agreement they had with the good work to be done. With these acts, the church sent them on their way (Acts 12:25-13:3).

Preaching at Paphos

The company first went to Seleucia, which was the port city of Antioch. It was located about 16 miles downstream. They sailed approximately one hundred miles to Salamis, the largest city on the eastern end of the island of Cyprus. Coffman reports that some 50 years after Barnabas and Saul were there, there was a Jewish uprising in which 240,000 Gentiles were slaughtered. Hadrian, a future Roman emperor, put down the rebellion and expelled the Jews from the city. Luke told Theophilus that Barnabas and Saul preached in the synagogues within the city. John Mark served as their attendant.

They crossed the island to Paphos, the capital city and home of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, identified by Luke as a wise man. He had a Jewish adviser known as Bar-jesus, who Luke also describes as a sorcerer, or one who used magic and incantations, and a false prophet. The name Elymas is an Arabic word meaning sorcerer. Sergius Paulus sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear God's word.

Elymas did everything he could to deter the proconsul from hearing these preachers, likely fearing he would lose his influence. Luke says Saul, who was also known by his Greek name, Paul, was filled with the Holy Spirit when he challenged the sorcerer. The apostle described him as a deceiver who opposed righteous living. By the power of God, Paul struck him blind for a season. Coffman notes the word "mist" was used by Hippocrates to describe any dimming of vision brought on by cataracts or disease. The teachings of Jesus which had been presented and the power of the miracle convinced Sergius Paulus to follow Christ in full obedience (Acts 13:4-12).

Proclaiming the Gospel in Antioch of Pisidia

Ash says they would have landed at the port of Attalia and then gone on the short distance to Perga. For some reason, John Mark decided to leave "Paul and his company," as Luke writes, at Perga. They went on to Antioch in Pisidia, which, at that time, was considered to be part of Galatia. The missionary group went into the synagogue on the Sabbath and listened to the reading of the scriptures. The rulers of the synagogue asked if they had some instruction to give them. Paul seized the moment and addressed the men of Israel and God fearers assembled there.

Paul briefly related the story of God's deliverance of the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage. He told of the forty years of wilderness wandering and how God defeated seven nations so Israel could have a home in Canaan. He reminded those assembled that God had ruled in Israel for 450 years by using judges. When the people asked for a king, God gave them Saul, then, David, after Saul was removed. It was from the seed of David, that God raised up a Savior for his people named Jesus. First, though, he sent John to prepare the way by preaching the baptism of repentance. John had told the people he was not the Messiah, but the One coming was He (Acts 13:13-25).

Paul then proclaimed that the message of the salvation brought by the Messiah was being delivered to them. The Jewish leaders and people fulfilled the prophecies about Christ's death because they did not recognize the Savior nor understand what the prophets had foretold. They crucified the Innocent and fulfilled all the other prophecies concerning his rejection, death and burial. However, God did not abandon Jesus, but raised him up. Many witnesses could tell of their seeing the resurrected Lord. So, Paul and Barnabas were delivering the message of the coming of the Holy One promised by God. The fact that Jesus' body was raised and did not stay in the tomb set him apart above David as God's promised Messiah (Isaiah 55:3; Psalm 16:10). Through him, then, remission of sins was made available to all who would obey him. The apostle warned them not to fulfill the prophecy of Habakkuk 1:5 which said some would reject the one God had clearly approved by great signs (Acts 13:26-41).

The Response to the Gospel in Antioch of Pisidia

As they went out of the synagogue, some were stirred to ask Paul and Barnabas to return the following week to speak again. The next sabbath day saw nearly the whole city gather to hear God's word proclaimed. Some of the Jews were jealous, upon seeing the large gathering, and contradicted the message Paul delivered and spoke against God. The apostle immediately let them know that they were required to preach to the Jews first, but if they were determined to reject the gospel, then they would preach to the Gentiles. This statement led to great rejoicing among the Gentiles and all who willingly obeyed the word were added to the kingdom by the Lord. Thus, the truth was spread throughout the region (Acts 13:42-49).

The Jews, meanwhile, stirred up the prominent women of the city and those in authority. They caused Paul and Barnabas to be persecuted and, finally, cast outside the city. Because they had so rejected the message, Paul and Barnabas shook the dust off their feet and went on to Iconium. Despite the opposition, those who had believed God's word rejoiced and were filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:50-52).

Discussion Questions

1. How were Barnabas and Saul called to their special work?
2. What opposition did they meet with in Paphos? How did they respond to it?
3. Why do you suppose John Mark might have left them at Perga?
4. Briefly relate the sermon Paul preached on the first sabbath in Perga.
5. What happened the following sabbath? What was the response of the Jews? What was the response of the Gentiles?

Lesson 18

Preaching Yields Varied Responses

Acts 14:1-28

A Great Multitude In Iconium Believed

When Paul and Barnabas arrived in Iconium, they immediately went to the synagogue and seized upon an opportunity to preach. Though no record is left of their exact words, Luke does let us know that the message was powerful enough to move a great multitude, comprised of both Jews and Gentiles, to obedient belief. However, those Jews who refused to obey the gospel did all they could to poison the thinking of the Gentile citizens, as well as the authorities very likely, so Paul and Barnabas could have no further impact on the city.

Nonetheless, they stayed on for some time in the city. As they preached, the Lord caused great miracles to be worked by them, thereby confirming the words as being from Him (Hebrews 2:3-4). The city continued to be divided into two groups, those who obediently believed the preached word and those who demonstrated their lack of belief by refusing to obey. The enemies of preaching conspired to work physical harm on the preachers, even to the point of stoning. So, they moved on and preached the gospel in Lystra and Derbe (Acts 14:1-7).

Idolatry Confronted at Lystra

Paul and Barnabas next arrived at Lystra, some 18 miles to the east. There was apparently no synagogue there, but there was a man who had been crippled since birth and had never walked. The lame man paid close attention to the words of the apostle. Paul recognized that the man fully believed he could be healed through the Jesus Paul preached. When Paul commanded him to stand on his feet, he leapt up and walked (Acts 14:8-10).

The people of Lystra were very superstitious. When they saw the lame man walk, they concluded the gods had come to be with them. They also decided Barnabas was Zeus, the patron god of that area, and Paul was Hermes, or Jupiter, who McGarvey calls the "god of Eloquence, and the constant attendant of Jupiter in his terrestrial visits." Since they spoke in the language of the Lycaonians, Paul and Barnabas did not, at first, understand what was happening.

The priest who served in the temple of Zeus on the road leading into the city brought oxen with garlands on their heads to be sacrificed to the two "visiting gods." Once they realized what was happening, Paul and Barnabas tore their clothes and ran in among the crowd shouting. They asked the people why they would do such a thing since they were mere mortals just like them. Their plea was for the people to turn from the empty worshipping of idols to serving the true God. This God was, as related by Paul and Barnabas, the creator of the universe. He had, for years, allowed man to ignorantly pursue his own path, though he always provided good things, like rain and the harvest. That speech was used to successfully thwart the intended sacrifice (Acts 14:11-18).

Though Stoned, Paul Continues Preaching!

The hostile Jews from Antioch in Pisidia and Iconium soon came to Lystra and persuaded the people to stone Paul. They dragged his seemingly lifeless body outside the city, thinking he was dead. The disciples gathered around him, perhaps in mourning. The apostle rose up, walked back into the city, spent the night and left the next morning with Barnabas! They travelled some 60 miles to the east to the city of Derbe, which was on the eastern most edge of Roman Galatia.

Their preaching in Derbe met with a good response and, after an unspecified length of time, they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch. Paul and Barnabas returned along the same path because they wanted to urge the brethren to remain faithful in spite of the persecution which was sure to come. Men were chosen in each city to serve as elders in the church. It should be noted that they were in every church and there was always a plurality of them. Obviously, their appointment was intended to help strengthen the church since Paul and Barnabas also prayed and fasted with them while urging them to rely on the Lord in whom they had placed their trust.

Luke told Theophilus that they retraced their steps all the way back to Antioch, where they had first been separated to the work. When they returned there, they got the whole church to assemble and related to them all God had accomplished on their journey. Two things stand out. First, they wanted the whole church to know what had been done by those sent out from them. Second, they gave credit to God for all the harvest. Then, they stayed for a good while with the brethren in Antioch (Acts 14:19-28).

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think Paul first went to the synagogue in Iconium?
2. What purpose did the working of miracles fulfill?
3. Describe the miracle at Lystra and the reaction of the people.
4. Why do you think Paul was willing to suffer as he did for preaching Christ?
5. What lessons can we learn about elders from Paul and Barnabas' actions on their journey back to Antioch?

Lesson 19

Questions About Circumcision

Acts 15:1-35

The Teachings of Certain Men

The teachings of certain men, who were apparently Pharisees in close association with James, caused a great uproar in the Gentile churches. They were saying that submission to the law of Moses, as demonstrated by circumcision, was required for one to be saved. They also taught that it was improper for a Jewish Christian to eat with Gentile Christians, likely specifically those who had not been circumcised. Their teachings led to Paul and Barnabas raising some serious questions and the apparent division of the church into two distinct camps. Ultimately, even Barnabas participated in the Judaizers' acts of hypocrisy. Commanded by the Lord and commissioned by the church in Antioch, Paul, Barnabas and some unnamed others went to Jerusalem (Acts 15:1-2, 5; Galatians 2:2, 12-13).

On their overland journey to Jerusalem, the group reported the conversions which had been occurring in the Gentile world because of the preaching of the gospel. The Christians who heard the report rejoiced because of the things God had accomplished. When they arrived in Jerusalem, they again reported on the good which had been done among the Gentiles. If, as it appears, Galatians 2 is a more detailed account of the events reported by Luke, Paul first reported to a small group of reputable men. In this way, public confrontation between apostles could be avoided. Converts from among the Pharisees still pressed their point by saying that all Gentiles who would go to heaven would have to submit to the law of Moses (Acts 15:3-5).

Resolving Conflict

The matter was placed before the apostles and elders to be considered. Quite a discussion followed. Though Peter's actions were not always commendable, as when he dissembled in Antioch, it is clear that the apostle knew the truth. He insisted that God intended for the Gentiles to receive salvation through Jesus and such was the rule of authority for the church. He reminded them that God had sent him to the house of Cornelius to preach the gospel and they were accepted on the basis of the same obedient faith demonstrated by the Jews on Pentecost. He asked why they would burden them with a law which neither they, nor their fathers, had been able to keep. In fact, he said placing such a requirement on the Gentiles would tempt God. Instead of meriting salvation through perfect law keeping, all would be saved by the grace of God. The stage was set for Paul and Barnabas' dramatic report of the miracles God had worked through them among the Gentiles (Acts 15:6-12).

James, the Lord's brother, then asked the group to listen to him as he reminded them of Simon Peter's work with Cornelius. He went on to quote from Amos 9:11-12, which he saw as referring prophetically to the inclusion of the Gentiles in God's people. So, James said he judged that they should not place legalistic requirements on the Gentiles which God had not placed on them (Galatians 1:7; 5:10). He listed four simple rules for them to follow. They were not to eat of things polluted by idol worship or participate in sexual immorality which was sometimes associated with idol worship. They also were not to eat meat from

an animal that died by strangulation or the blood of animals. These last two rules actually predated the law of Moses. They were first essentially given to Noah (Genesis 9:4). Since the law of Moses was still being read in the synagogues, this served as a good means of maintaining fellowship (Acts 15:13-21).

A Letter for the Gentiles

The group decided to send Paul and Barnabas back to the Gentiles along with some men closely associated with the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. Judas Barsabas and Silas were specially selected to go help deliver a letter which explained the thinking of the assembled group. McGarvey thought these men might have been sent because they had not been associated with converting the Gentiles and would be "above suspicion of undue partiality toward them." He went on to suggest that they "might use their influence with the Jewish brethren to induce them to accept the teaching of the epistle."

When they got to Antioch, the multitude of believers assembled to hear the letter from the apostles and elders. After they heard they were to be accepted into the church without submitting to the law of Moses, there was great rejoicing. Further words of encouragement were delivered by Judas and Silas, who Luke says were prophets. The brethren told them they could return to Jerusalem after they had spent an unspecified amount of time with them. However, Silas apparently chose to remain in Antioch (Acts 15:22-35).

Discussion Questions

1. Describe the teachings which likely caused the turmoil among the Gentiles.
2. What sad consequences came out of such teachings? (Consider Galatians 2 in your answer.)
3. Briefly relate the testimony of Peter, Paul and Barnabas before the Jerusalem conference.
4. In your own words, tell James' judgment in the matter and the facts which helped him conclude as he did.
5. Why do you think Judas and Silas were sent with Paul and Barnabas to deliver the letter to the Gentiles? How did the Gentile Christians respond?
6. Though we have no living apostles today, what can we learn about conflict in the church?

Lesson 20

Paul Chooses Silas

Acts 15:36-16:40

Contention Parts Paul and Barnabas

Paul knew the importance of continued teaching and encouragement for young churches, so he approached Barnabas about visiting the brethren in all the cities in which they had previously preached. Barnabas had a strong desire to take his cousin, John Mark, on the journey. Paul did not want to go with the man who had left them at Perga on their first journey (Acts 15:36-38; 13:13). Both Paul and Barnabas were so firm in their opinions, even to the point of being provoked to anger, that they had to separate.

It should be noted that Paul later used Barnabas as a good example of one who worked to support himself while preaching the gospel. He also described John Mark as one who was useful in ministry (1 Corinthians 9:6; 2 Timothy 4:11). As Coffman says, "the one redeeming note in this otherwise unhappy and regrettable episode is that neither party to the dispute permitted it to hinder the work of God."

Luke quietly noted that God used the disagreement between these two great men of faith to produce two teams to go in different directions with the gospel. Barnabas went with John Mark to Cyprus, his homeland (Acts 15:39; 4:36). Paul took Silas, one of the leading men among the brethren at Jerusalem (Acts 15:22), with him. It appears he had to return from Jerusalem, but Luke does not give us the details of how he and Paul got together (Acts 15:33). They went through Syria and Cilicia to southern Galatia. Along the way, they strengthened the churches (Acts 15:40-41).

Timothy Joins Paul and Silas

The stoning at Lystra might have discouraged some men from returning. However, Luke told Theophilus that Paul and Barnabas went back through the city as they were strengthening the churches at the end of their missionary tour.

Then, Paul returned again with Silas and discovered a young convert with great potential. Timothy, the son of Eunice, a Jewish convert, and a Greek father, was highly recommended by the brethren. Because Timothy had been raised as a Jew, Paul had him circumcised. This robbed any contentious Jew of at least one argument he might have thrown up in the apostle's face when he entered the synagogue to teach (compare 1 Corinthians 9:20).

Paul then left with Timothy and Silas to carry the message from the meeting at Jerusalem to all the churches with which the apostle had previously worked. In this way, he prepared them to fend off the potential attacks of the Judaizers. Luke reported that the churches were strengthened in the faith and continued to grow in number (Acts 16:1-5).

The Macedonian Call

Just west of the cities in south Galatia was the Roman province of Asia. At this time, Luke says Paul was forbidden by the Holy Spirit to enter that region to teach. This might have been done directly or through the agency of a prophet inspired by the Spirit (compare Acts 20:23; 21:10-11). Later in Acts 19, Paul did get his opportunity to preach in Asia and the church grew there in a fine way, as is evidenced by the Lord's letters in Revelation 2-3. Apparently, Paul and those with him continued to work their way along until they came to Mysia, which was at the northern border between Asia and Bithynia. They would have gone into Bithynia, but the Spirit again forbade them to go, so they turned westward to Troas. Bithynia may have later heard the word through the preaching of Peter (1 Peter 1:1).

Paul and his company determined, after a vision the apostle had in the night, that the Lord wanted them to preach in Macedonia. So, they immediately made arrangements and set sail from Troas to Samothrace, then Neapolis and, finally, Philippi (Acts 16:6-12), which Luke described as "the foremost city of that part of Macedonia, a colony."

The Conversion of Lydia

It customarily took ten Jewish heads of households to form a synagogue within a community. In Philippi, there was just a group of Jewish women who met by the riverside for prayer. Paul's company joined the women on the Sabbath day and spoke to them. One of the women, Lydia, was a seller of purple. "An expensive purple dye, made of the murex shell, was one of the most valuable commodities of antiquity; and Lydia's engaging in trade of such a product surely indicates some considerable capital" (Coffman, p. 314). Lydia's home city was Thyatira, in the province of Asia. So, though Paul had been forbidden to go to Asia personally (verse 6), he got to teach one of its citizens.

This worshipper of God had her heart opened by hearing the words spoken by Paul. Lydia and other members of her household obeyed the spoken word by being baptized. She then pleaded with Paul and the others to come stay as guests in her house. Paul may have hesitated because she was a single woman, which seems to be indicated by reference to her house. However, when she prefaced her request by saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord," Paul yielded (Acts 16:13-15).

Paul and Silas Imprisoned

Luke reported that the group went for prayer, possibly daily. A slave girl who was demon possessed followed them crying out, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation." It might seem that such an occurrence would be very helpful in furthering the gospel, but Paul clearly did not think so. After all, the people believed this girl could foretell the future and her masters made considerable profit in the process. Further, as McGarvey notes, to accept the recommendation of demons would have been to lend credence to anything else the demon might have made her say, even lies. So, Paul cast out the demon by the authority of Jesus.

Her masters, seeing their profit potential ruined, grabbed Paul and Silas and dragged them before the authorities in the marketplace. They based their accusations on racial prejudice, which may have been heightened by the fact that Claudias had banished Jews from Rome (Acts 18:2). This may also explain why Luke, a Greek physician, and Timothy, whose father was Greek, were not also seized. Mob rule prevailed and the magistrates had Paul and Silas beaten, cast into the inner prison and their feet placed in stocks (Acts 16:16-24).

The Conversion of the Jailer

At midnight, while the other prisoners listened to Paul and Silas singing and praying, a great earthquake shook open all the prison doors and released all those bound in stocks. Believing his prisoners had escaped, the jailor prepared to kill himself rather than face the torturous Roman judgment. Paul stopped him by crying out that they were all there and he should not harm himself.

The jailor called for lights, leaped into the prison in trembling fear, fell before Paul and Silas, brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" The inspired response was, as in other cases (Acts 2:37-38; 22:10, 16), based on the current condition of the one asking the question. The jailor was told, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." Then, they spoke the word of the Lord to him so that faith could be produced (Romans 10:17). The same hour of the night, he washed their stripes, which is clear evidence of repentance. Immediately afterward, he and all the members of his household were baptized. Then, and only then, "he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household (Acts 16:25-34).

Paul's Refusal to Depart Secretly

The next morning, the magistrates sent to the prison to quietly release Paul and Silas. The apostle refused to go quietly, likely because he wanted the authorities to realize even Roman citizens had believed in Jesus. A Roman could not be beaten and imprisoned without due process of law. Likely, Paul had tried to stop the previous day's actions by appealing to his citizenship but had been ignored. Now, he would only leave the jail if the magistrates personally escorted him! Then, instead of being run out of town, they were asked to leave. Before they continued on their journey, they returned to Lydia's house, encouraged the brethren and bid them farewell (Acts 16:35-40).

Discussion Questions

1. What lessons can be learned from Paul and Barnabas about conflict in the church?
2. What can we learn from Paul and Barnabas about developing church leaders?
3. What correlation do you see between strengthening the church in the faith and numerical growth?
4. How did God open Lydia's heart? What did she do in response to His will?
5. Give some reasons Paul may have cast the demon out of the slave girl.
6. What did the jailor and members of his household do which showed they truly believed in God?
7. How did Paul respond to the magistrate's attempt to quietly set them free and drive them out of town? Why do you think the apostle chose such an approach?

Lesson 21

Ascent to Mars Hill

Acts 17:1-34

Preaching in Thessalonica

Luke did not tell Theophilus why Paul passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia. He did explain that the next stop on this second missionary tour was Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. As was his habit, Paul went to the synagogue for three consecutive Sabbath days to reason with the Jews. The very idea of a crucified Messiah was a stumbling block to the Jews (1 Corinthians 1:23), but Paul argued from the prophets that such was precisely what God had foretold (Isaiah 53). He further established that God had planned and accomplished Jesus' resurrection from the dead and made Him King over His people (Acts 2:22-36; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4). The scriptural evidence was supported by the miracles worked by the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Thessalonians 1:5).

During Paul's three weeks teaching in the synagogue, he and Silas worked with their own hands to support themselves (1 Thessalonians 2:9). Philippians 4:16 also tells us the apostle received support from the brethren in Philippi on at least two occasions. The combination of scriptural preaching, miracles and the apostle's obvious commitment to reach the lost had its desired effect as some Jews, Greeks who worshipped God and prominent women from the community obeyed the gospel (Acts 17:1-4; 1 Thessalonians 1:9).

These events, somewhat naturally, moved the unbelieving Jews to jealousy. They enlisted the aid of some "vile fellows of the rabble" and stirred up a mob to go to Jason's house and bring Paul and Silas out. When they could not find the two missionaries, the mob dragged Jason and some brethren before the rulers of the city. They accused Paul and Silas of being part of the number who turned the world upside down and teaching that Jesus was King. The rulers thought the matter serious enough to require security, perhaps like a property bond, of Jason and the others, warning them that it would be forfeited if any further disturbance occurred. Under these difficult conditions, Paul and Silas were sent away by night to Berea, some 60 miles away (Acts 17:5-10a).

Preaching in Berea

Paul and Silas immediately entered the synagogue to teach. Rather than base their decisions on the traditional teachings of man, the Bereans carefully examined the word of God to determine the truthfulness of the teachings they heard. The result was that many Jews believed the gospel along with honorable Greek women and not a few men. Unfortunately, this once again stirred jealousy among the unbelieving Jews of Thessalonica who journeyed to Berea and stirred up the multitudes. Some brethren escorted Paul safely to the sea while Silas and Timothy continued at Berea. The brethren journeyed on to Athens with Paul and were asked by the apostle to send Silas and Timothy as soon as possible (Acts 17:10b-15).

Paul and the Athenian Philosophers

While he waited, Paul apparently toured the city and discovered it was totally given over to idolatry. This provoked, or one might say angered, him. He

went to the synagogue to reason with the Jews and devout Greeks of the city. He also discussed the gospel with those he met in the marketplace. This drew the attention of certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers, some of whom decided they wanted what the "babblers" had to say, while others thought he was talking about foreign gods.

They did take hold of the apostle in a non-threatening way and brought him to the Areopagus, or Mars Hill, to present his new philosophy. Coffman notes that Mars was the mythical god of war. One story had it that he was tried on Mars Hill for the murder of one of Neptune's sons. Interestingly, a messenger for the true Prince of Peace was placed in that spot so that curious philosophers might hear something new (Acts 17:16-21).

Paul's Sermon on Mars Hill

The apostle began his sermon by noting that they were very religious, worshipping idols devoted to all types of gods, even an unknown God. Paul seized upon their recognition of their own potentially limited knowledge and began to tell them about the true God. Rather than there being a series of gods, each over some small element of the universe, there is one God who created and rules over all! The Creator is not confined to some building made by men, nor did He need men's worship. In fact, Paul stated that all beings and all things are sustained by His power.

Paul further declared that the God of heaven had made all the various nationalities. He worked within them in precisely the way and at precisely the time He planned. The apostle to the Gentiles explained that this Divinely controlled ebb and flow of history was used by God to encourage men to seek him. Yet, the supreme God is always near since we live in him, move in him and depend upon him for our very existence. Paul noted that one of their own poets said men are God's offspring, so God cannot be stone but must be alive just as his children are alive.

Paul then boldly stated that God would no longer overlook the ignorant worship of men. Instead, He demanded that they turn from their ignorance and serve him. Paul saw such repentance as especially important since a day of judgment had been set aside by the Divine Planner. In that day, the resurrected Lord will rightly judge all men, which fact is confirmed by his resurrection from the dead. While some of Paul's listeners mocked his words, others wanted to hear more. A few actually were moved to obey the gospel (Acts 17:22-34).

Discussion Questions

1. List some scriptures which show God planned for Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection.
2. What should we do today to be considered "noble" like the Bereans?
3. After discussing our current society and living conditions, describe some opportunities we might have to proclaim the gospel to those in "ignorance."
4. Using Paul's sermon on Mars Hill and other scriptures, discuss the nature of God and His work among men.
5. How does the response to Paul's sermon parallel our day? What encouraging facts do you find in the various reactions recorded by Luke?

Lesson 22

Serving in Corinth

Acts 18:1-28

Paul Travelled to Corinth

Luke did not explain why Paul left Athens or how he journeyed on to Corinth (Acts 18:1). The apostle may have grown weary of the so called intellectuals of Athens who continually wanted to hear more but refused to obey. The journey of some forty miles could have been made in two days on foot or one day if one sailed. Whichever route they took, the final destination was the city of Corinth.

Corinth was the capital and chief city of Achaia. Achaia is in the area we would now call Greece. Corinth became such an important city because of its location just one and a half miles south of the Isthmus of Corinth. It was able to control that four mile wide neck of land. The city also commanded the eastern port of that isthmus, Cenchreae, which is mentioned in Acts 18:18. To save time and avoid the one hundred fifty miles of dangerous waters around the tip of Greece, ships would unload their goods on one side of the isthmus and have them carried to the other side. Some smaller ships were even pulled across and placed in the water on the other side. Therefore, Corinth was a trading center by land and sea. Of course, it was also strategic militarily speaking.

The Roman minority in Corinth was a strong force in the population, as this was one of the colonies established by Julius Caesar. The commercial prospects caused a large group of Jews to settle in the city. Greeks also played a great role. Because of the seaport and commerce, many other nationalities mixed with the above mentioned major groups.

Corinth was well known for its corruption. Charles Pfeiffer, in Baker's Bible Atlas, writes, "Greeks, Romans, Jews and adventurers from the entire Mediterranean world came to Corinth for trade and vice in all its forms. 'To live like a Corinthian,' became synonymous with a life of luxury and licentiousness." The immoral nature of the city was added to by the temple of Aphrodite, goddess of love, which was located in Corinth. A thousand priestesses of the goddess served as prostitutes who were available for the free use of temple visitors.

Tentmaking With Aquila and Priscilla

In Corinth, Paul found two Jews, Aquila, who was from Pontus which was a province between Bithynia and Armenia, and his wife Priscilla, who was also known as Prisca (2 Timothy 4:19). Luke reports they, and all other Jews, were driven out of Rome by the Emperor Claudius. Ash believes this refers to the imperial banishment of A. D. 49. Concerning Paul's association with Aquila, Boles says, "It is also significant to know that Paul 'found' him. The Jews had certain guilds by which they kept together whether in street or synagogue."

In 1 Corinthians 2:3, Paul says, "I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling." We can only imagine the apostle arriving in Corinth, alone and with little or nothing to eat. Like all good Jews, Paul had been taught a trade and immediately found two Jews of like occupation with whom to live and work.

"Tentmaking," according to Ash, included any type of leather work in Paul's day. Whether his fellow leather workers were Christians as of yet is not known. Paul's later writings do make it clear that these two became special friends and allies of the apostle as he preached the gospel of peace (Acts 18: 2-3; Romans 16:3; 1 Corinthians 16:9).

Preaching in Corinth

Following his normal pattern, Paul first preached in the synagogue in Corinth. During that time, Silas and Timothy once again joined the apostle's company. Silas may have come from Berea, while Timothy likely arrived from Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 3:1-2). Luke reported that about the time of their arrival Paul became fully immersed in telling the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. When the Jews rejected the truth and spoke against the Lord, Paul began to preach to the Gentiles.

Paul next did his preaching in the house of Justus, which was adjacent to the synagogue. Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed and was baptized by the apostle's own hands. Those in Crispus' family and many other Corinthians also believed and were baptized (Acts 18:4-8; 1 Corinthians 1:14).

The Lord then reassured Paul, in a vision, and encouraged him to continue preaching in Corinth. He promised that Paul would not be harmed and assured the apostle that there were many more who would obey the gospel.

The Jews brought Paul to the judgment seat before Gallio when he was proconsul of Achaia. They accused Paul of preaching contrary to Moses' law, but Gallio drove them out without trying the case because it did not have anything to do with Roman law. Some of the Greeks seized Sosthenes, the new ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before Gallio's judgment seat without the proconsul taking any notice. So, Paul worked on in Corinth for some time before taking leave of the brethren and sailing for Syria with Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:9-18). Luke also reported that the apostle took a vow in Cenchræa and had his head shorn.

Paul's Return to Antioch

Paul spent a short time preaching in the synagogue in Ephesus. He promised to return if it was God's will, left Priscilla and Aquila and sailed on to Caesarea. The apostle made a quick trip to Jerusalem and then went to Antioch. After some time, the apostle went on to strengthen the churches in Galatia and Phrygia (Acts 18:19-23).

Apollos

At Ephesus, an Alexandrian Jew named Apollos, who was an eloquent speaker, began to preach about Jesus. Luke assured Theophilus that Apollos was mighty in the scriptures and very accurate in his teachings about Jesus, but reported that he only knew about John's baptism.

Apollos began to boldly preach in the synagogue. Apparently, Priscilla and Aquila heard him there and recognized his inadequate understanding of baptism. So they took him aside privately to more fully instruct him in the ways of the Lord. Apollos then decided to go into Achaia and the brethren wrote him a letter of recommendation. In Achaia, he was able to give great assistance to the brethren through using powerful arguments from God's word to show Jesus was the Christ (Acts 18:24-28).

Discussion Questions

1. Describe the city of Corinth. Explain how Paul obtained support there and his association with Priscilla and Aquila.
2. Why did Paul first preach in the synagogue in Corinth? What made him quit?
3. Where did Paul next preach? What were the results?
4. Discuss Jesus' promise to Paul and the way he used Gallio to accomplish his purpose.
5. Why do you suppose Priscilla and Aquila took Apollos aside to correct the shortcomings in his preaching? What lesson might we learn from their approach?

Lesson 23

A Riot in Ephesus

Acts 19:1-41

Some Disciples Who Were Reimmersed

From Corinth, Paul went on to Ephesus. He met a group of disciples and asked them if they had received the Holy Spirit. Apparently they were some of those who had been taught by Apollos prior to the time he had been taught the way of the Lord more perfectly. They were disciples of Christ, because Apollos "taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John" (Acts 19:1-2; 18:24-25). They answered Paul's question about receipt of the Holy Spirit by saying they did not even know there was a Holy Spirit. McGarvey thinks the word "given" ought to be supplied after "We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit." He points out that a similar understanding is needed in reading John 7:39 or else the Lord could be understood to be saying the Holy Spirit did not yet exist.

A failure to know about any gift of the Holy Spirit whatsoever would truly point out a flaw in the instructions they had received, so Paul asked, "Into what then were you baptized?" Their having been baptized in John's baptism would not have presented a problem when that baptism was valid prior to the death of the Lord. However, Paul said John told people to repent, be baptized and believe on the Christ who would follow him. For those who would be Christians, belief in Jesus would precede one's repentance and baptism under the authority of his name for the remission of sins (Acts 19:3-4; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38).

Having heard further about John's directions, those disciples were baptized under the authority of Christ. The apostle then laid his hands on them and they received miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit which enabled them to speak in languages they had never studied and proclaim God's will. Luke told Theophilus there were twelve men in the group (Acts 19:5-7).

Teaching in the School of Tyrannus

Paul next entered into the synagogue to boldly teach the Jews about the gospel. It should be remembered that the apostle had already taught in the synagogue in Ephesus and had been urged to teach further. He had left for the feast in Jerusalem, all the while promising to return and teach some more (Acts 18:19-21). On this return visit, he reasoned with them for three months and persuaded them about matters concerning the kingdom of God.

When some of the Jews became hard hearted and against the way of salvation, or life, Paul withdrew with the disciples to continue teaching in the school of Tyrannus. He continued to instruct all who would listen over the space of some two years. The effects radiated out throughout all of Asia. So, the apostle who had previously been forbidden to preach in Asia now got to see much fruit born for God in that region. In fact, many believe his teaching helped to establish the seven churches to whom Christ wrote in the book of Revelation (Acts 19:8-10; Revelation 2-3).

Magnifying Jesus' Name

God caused some great miracles to be worked through Paul. Even pieces of cloth, like a handkerchief or apron, which had touched his body could be placed on the body of the sick and diseases or evil spirits went out. Some wandering Jewish exorcists, who apparently had previously been unsuccessful in casting out demons, tried to capitalize on the power of God they had seen at work through Paul. Particularly, the seven sons of Sceva attempted to cast out an evil spirit by calling on the name of Jesus' whom Paul preached. The spirit recognized both Jesus and Paul but caused the possessed man to leap on, overpower and strip them, so that they ran away wounded and naked (Acts 19:11-16).

Since an irreverent use of the name of Jesus precipitated this attack by the evil spirit, both Jews and Greeks dwelling in Ephesus were moved to reverent awe for the authority of Jesus. Many Christians, along with others, then confessed their previous involvement in the magical arts. Books costing some 50,000 pieces of silver were publicly thrown into a pile and burned. From that point forward, the gospel grew in a great way and conquered the hearts of many in the region. At the end of this great period of growth, Luke reported that Paul mapped out plans to go through Macedonia and Achaia on the way to Jerusalem. Then, he wanted to go on to Rome. He sent Timothy and Erastus on to Macedonia while personally staying on in Asia (Acts 19:17-22).

The Riot in Ephesus

While Timothy and Erastus were away, a man named Demetrius, a silversmith who made shrines of Diana, or Artemis, began to stir people up against Christianity. He called together the other members of his craft, reminding them that their wealth came from making silver idols. He truthfully reported that Paul's preaching had impacted people in Ephesus and throughout Asia. He said Paul had declared idols made with hands were not gods, to the point of destroying their business and causing Diana to fall into disrepute.

The enraged mob began to shout, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" Of course, the whole city came together to see what was happening. Along the way, they seized two Macedonian travel companions of Paul, Gaius and Aristarchus. Paul wanted to go in to the people, but the brethren would not allow it. Asian officials who were his friends also pleaded with him not to enter the theatre. Luke reported that many in the crowd did not even know what was happening.

When some Jews singled out Alexander to make a defense and the people found out he was a Jew, the crowd shouted, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" for two hours. Then, the city clerk quieted the crowd and appealed for reason and a lawful approach to the matter. After all, he said, no one could deny Ephesus was the guardian of Diana. He proposed that Demetrius and his colleagues make their case before the authorities, if they had a case. He warned that such an assembly might be questioned by the Roman government and quietly dismissed the crowd (Acts 19:23-41).

Discussion Questions

1. What caused 12 men to be baptized again?
2. Are there any similar circumstances which might cause one to consider being baptized again today?
3. What caused the gospel to radiate out from Ephesus to all of Asia?
4. Why did the people of Ephesus burn their books about the magical arts? Can you think of any books or other things which Christians should consider destroying today?
5. List the arguments of Demetrius and explain how each might, or might not, be truthful.
6. What lessons can be gleaned from the angry mob? The city clerk's speech?

Lesson 24

Visiting Troas and the Ephesian Elders

Acts 20:1-38

Travelling from Ephesus to Troas

After encouraging the Ephesian brethren, Paul went on to Macedonia. He also built up the churches there before he went on to Greece. His work there continued for some three months. Then, he planned to sail to Syria, until the Jews plotted to kill him. When the apostle learned of the plot against his life, he headed north back into Macedonia instead. As Paul was carrying a large contribution to Jerusalem to help the needy saints, he took along several men, likely to serve as witnesses to the proper handling of the money.

Coffman said, "One may observe that Macedonian congregations were represented by Sopater, Aristarchus and Secundus; the Galatian congregations were represented by Gaius of Derbe and Timothy of Lystra; the ones in Asia were represented by Tychicus and Trophimus; and it may be inferred from 2 Corinthians 8:6ff. that the Corinthians contribution was entrusted to Titus and two other brethren sent by Paul to Corinth to receive it." It may be that they went around collecting the funds with the goal of meeting at a predetermined location, which would have been Troas. Luke rejoined Paul at Philippi and they sailed for Troas after the Passover (Acts 20:1-6).

Paul's Stay In Troas

Luke's seemingly casual comment that Paul and his company stayed seven days in Troas actually serves to enlighten us as to the custom of worship in New Testament times. They came together on the first day of the week to break bread. They were there on every other day of the week, yet they partook on the Lord's day. Though an inspired apostle spoke on that occasion, mention of that fact takes a back seat to remembering the Lord's death. The first day was also the day Jesus was raised and the day his church was established (Mark 16:9; Acts 2: Leviticus 23:15-16). Now, when God said, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy" (Exodus 20:8), the Jews understood that he meant every Sabbath.

Gus Nichols wrote a good article on the frequency of our Lord's supper observance. In it, he quoted 1 Corinthians 11:20-22 and said, "If a school teacher should say to some naughty boys, 'You did not come here to learn,' she would be understood to mean that they should have come for that purpose. Hence the apostle's meaning is clear when in reproving the church he said they had not assembled to eat the Lord's supper." From this excellent analysis, we conclude that early Christians assembled to partake of the Lord's supper. Nichols also tells us "the Greek preposition 'Kata' is used in this passage, and means 'every,' with reference to week." (1 Corinthians 16:2) Thus, we have the early church assembling every first day of the week. We know they assembled to break bread and Paul tells them to give every first day of the week.

Paul's lesson continued until midnight. The church assembled in a third story room. A young man, named Eutychus, who was sitting in a window listening, went to sleep and fell out of the window. After he was pronounced dead, Paul took him up in his arms and announced that his life was still in him. The miraculous restoration of life having been completed, the Christians again assembled in their upper room to eat a meal together. The conversation lasted until daybreak, which indicates just how highly the brethren thought of the apostle. They, along with the young man raised just hours before, walked with the apostle as he departed. Luke notes they were more than a little comforted (Acts 20:7-12).

Meeting with the Elders from Ephesus

The rest of the apostle's company travelled by ship to Assos, while he went on foot. He joined them in the ship at Assos and went on with them to Mitylene, then by Chios, a brief stop at Samos, staying for a time at Trogyllium and a more extended stay at Miletus. Luke explained Paul's longer stay in Miletus by saying Paul intended to sail by Ephesus in hopes of reaching Jerusalem before Pentecost. So, he called for the elders of the church at Ephesus to meet him at Miletus. When they arrived, he reminded them of the struggles he faced while in Asia. He had served the Lord with a humble attitude, even being moved to tears at times and surviving more than one Jewish plot against his life. Yet, he had faithfully declared the truth to them, both publicly, in the synagogue and the school of Tyrannus, and teaching in one house, then another. His preaching had extended to Jews as well as Greeks and included the need for repentance and faith (Acts 20:13-21).

Having reminded them of his time working among them, Paul next told the elders he was compelled to go on to Jerusalem, despite the knowledge of what awaited him there. The Holy Spirit had testified to him, through the voices of prophets and other inspired men (Acts 21:10-11), concerning his impending arrest and the other trials he would confront in Jerusalem. Paul's greatest concern was not for his own personal safety but with completing the special ministry Jesus had given him, or preaching the kingdom, which is one and the same. He did not expect to ever see the faces of those elders again. So, he called upon them to faithfully witness the content of his preaching among those at Ephesus. He had preached the whole truth, thus relieving himself of any responsibility for those who might have remained in sin (Acts 20:22-27).

Paul's Charge to the Ephesian Elders

Because he did not anticipate seeing them again, the apostle charged those elders, who had been selected on the basis of the qualifications listed by the Holy Spirit, to watch out for their own spiritual well being. Further, they were commanded by the apostle to watch out for every sheep in God's flock at Ephesus. This was specifically the case because they had been given oversight, or made bishops, over the flock purchased with Jesus' blood. Such a watchful state was necessary because false teachers, even from within the eldership, would draw away disciples. Particularly, Paul urged the elders to remember his own watchful service of three years. He had warned them day and night, even with crying.

Paul recommended that the shepherds trust God and his word, which would help them grow stronger and inherit eternal life. He reminded them that he worked with his own hands to support himself and did not covet anyone's money. He urged them to labor to support themselves and help the weak, while reminding them that Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." After kneeling with them in prayer, Paul tearfully departed (Acts 20:28-38).

Discussion Questions

1. List the men who traveled with Paul while he carried the collection to Jerusalem. Why do you think it was wise for them to be with him?
2. What lessons about the Lord's Supper can you find in Paul's stay at Troas?
3. In your own words, describe Paul's stay in Ephesus as he related it to the Ephesian elders. What good points can be gleaned from this?
4. Describe Paul's warning to the elders and lessons which you might find in it.
5. What good did Paul find in God's word?
6. What should our attitude be toward poor brethren?

Lesson 25

Paul Arrested!

Acts 21:1-36

Warnings On the Road To Jerusalem

The departure from Miletus was an emotional one. In fact, Luke used the word for depart which Thayer says means, "tear away." They went from Cos, to Rhodes, to Patara. Then, they boarded a ship sailing to Phoenicia. They passed Cyprus and sailed to Syria, where they stopped at Tyre for the ship to unload its cargo. Paul and his companions sought out the Lord's followers in that city and stayed seven days with them. Since the Spirit played a key role in the start of this journey toward Jerusalem, it seems likely the disciples, having further revelations from the Spirit concerning Paul's coming imprisonment, begged him not to go (Acts 21:1-4; 19:21; compare 21:11-14).

At the end of their week long visit, Paul's company walked toward the ship with an escort composed of the many Christian men in the city of Tyre, along with their wives and children. They all stopped for prayer upon reaching the shore. Then, the apostle and those with him boarded the ship and the others returned home. The ship went on from Tyre to Ptolemais, where they were again greeted by the brethren. After one day's stay, they went on to Caesarea, where they spent some time in the house of Philip the proclaimer of good news. This was the same Philip who was chosen for the ministration to the widows and, likely, the one who taught the Ethiopian. Luke reported that Philip had four virgin daughters who prophesied (Acts 21:5-9).

Agabus (Acts 11:28) also came to Philip's house at the same time as Paul's company. The prophet took Paul's belt, or girdle, and bound his own hands and feet. He then explained that the Holy Spirit was foretelling Paul's being taken prisoner by the Jews and turned over to the Gentiles. All those who heard the prophecy, including Luke, begged the apostle not to go to Jerusalem. Paul explained that his trip to Jerusalem was one he was making in an effort to fulfill his commission to preach the gospel. So, he asked why they would cry and break his heart, since he was not only ready to be bound but to die for his Master. When the others realized the strength of the apostle's convictions in the matter, they yielded and expressed the desire that the Lord's will be accomplished (Acts 21:10-14).

Paul Urged To Take Peaceful Actions

The group next travelled on to Jerusalem where they planned to lodge with one of the early disciples, Mnason of Cyprus. They were joyfully greeted by the brethren in Jerusalem. Paul may well have viewed this as an answer to the prayers he had been asking others to pray for him (Romans 15:30-31). At least they did receive the gift of money Paul brought to help the needy saints. The next day, Paul delivered a report to James and all the elders concerning the things God had accomplished among the Gentiles through Paul. The group naturally glorified God for the good which had been done (Acts 21:15-20a).

Then, the assembled group explained to Paul that thousands of Jews had obeyed the gospel of Christ in Jerusalem. They also still tried to adhere strictly to the law of Moses. Someone, or some group, had spread the rumor that Paul taught Jews who lived among the Gentiles that they should forsake Moses' law,

especially by refusing to circumcise their children. Of course, this was false. Paul had actually circumcised Timothy with his own hand (Acts 16:3). Yet, a full understanding of the effect of the cross on the ordinances of the law of Moses would ultimately result in the end of circumcision as a religious act (Acts 21:20b-21).

Naturally, the church would hear of Paul's arrival in Jerusalem and would assemble. Therefore, James and the others proposed that Paul purify himself along with four men who had taken a vow. The apostle was also urged to pay the expenses involved in their vows. The purpose in these actions was to silence those who were falsely charging Paul. This writer must admit that this event poses certain thorny questions. Did Paul compromise his teachings about the law being a schoolmaster to lead men to Christ by purifying himself and paying for a vow under Moses' law? Or, did he recognize that these things did not have to do with salvation, so he could do them in an effort to further reach out to the Jews? No certain answer seems apparent. At least James and the elders were consistent in not requiring the Gentiles to follow the law of Moses (Acts 21:22-25).

Paul's Arrest in the Temple

Paul yielded to the proposal set forth by James and the others and began to be purified, perhaps to enter the inner part of the temple (See McGarvey). Near the end of the seven days of purification, some Jews from Asia found Paul in the temple area and called for others to help them. They accused him of: 1.) teaching against the Jews; 2.) teaching against the law; 3.) teaching against the temple; and 4.) bringing Greeks into the temple, thereby defiling it. As to the last charge, Luke reported that they had seen Paul in the city with Trophimus the Ephesian and supposed he had brought him into the temple. An angry mob seized the apostle and dragged him into the court of the Gentiles. The doors to the temple's inner court were shut so that no blood would defile it (Acts 21:26-30).

Through God's providence, word reached the chief captain of the Roman garrison guarding Jerusalem. He rushed with perhaps 300 men into the midst of the mob violence. The mob left off beating Paul as the soldiers arrived. The chief captain ordered Paul to be bound with two chains and asked of his crime. Different, possibly conflicting, answers were given, so he ordered Paul taken to the castle. The soldiers literally had to carry Paul as a large part of the crowd followed, shouting, "Away with him." (Acts 21:31-36).

Discussion Questions

1. What lessons do you find in Paul's actions at Tyre?
2. Describe Agabus' prophecy, the group's tearful request and Paul's response.
3. How were Paul and the gift for the needy saints received by James and the elders?
4. Why do you suppose they asked Paul to participate in the purification of four men?
5. Describe the events surrounding Paul's arrest.
6. Do you find any possible lessons in the response of the Jews to the proposed compromise?

Lesson 26

Speaking To a Mob In Jerusalem

Acts 21:37-23:10

Paul's Request to be Allowed to Speak

In proper fashion, Paul asked the chief captain, who had taken him prisoner, if he could speak. The captain was surprised to hear Paul so fluently speak to him in Greek, since he had assumed he was an Egyptian criminal. The captain described the man in question as the one who had led a band of some 4,000 men in rebellion. Josephus indicates they first attacked the Roman authorities in Jerusalem, then the Egyptian ran away into the wilderness.

Paul explained to the captain that he was a Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia. Coffman says, "Coins excavated from Tarsus carry the inscription, 'Metropolis Autonomous,' indicating that it had been granted autonomy by the Romans. It was an important metropolis noted for its educational facilities, as well as for trade, shipbuilding, and commerce." The apostle went on to ask him for permission to speak to the very multitude that only moments before had sought to kill him! Once permission was granted, Paul gestured with his hand to gain the attention of the audience and a hush fell over the crowd. He then began to speak to them in Hebrew, or Aramaic (Acts 21:37-40). Bruce says, "Aramaic was not only the vernacular of Palestinian Jews, but was the common speech of all non-Greek speakers in western Asia, as far east as (and including) the Parthian empire beyond the Euphrates."

Paul's First Defense

Since his audience was primarily Jewish, Paul addressed them as "Brethren and fathers" (Acts 2:29; 7:2; 13:26). The defense he wants them to hear is much like verbal arguments one might make in his own behalf in a court of law. Remember, Paul's accusers had said he taught against the Jews, the law of Moses, the temple and brought Greeks into the temple, thereby defiling the holy place (Acts 21:28). In response to their first accusation, the apostle noted he was a Jew. He was born in Tarsus, but he was reared in the city of Jerusalem as a pupil of the highly respected Jewish teacher, Gamaliel. He had been taught the law, which was handed down from the Jewish fathers, in a most precise way. In fact, he had become a zealot for God, just as had his accusers. His zeal had reached the point where he persecuted those following Christ's way by binding, imprisoning and ultimately assisting in their deaths. As witnesses to his zeal, Paul cited the high priest and council of the elders. The apostle had received letters from them to give him authority to go to Damascus to bring Christians from that city in chains to Jerusalem to be punished (Acts 22:1-5).

Paul next began to relate the unique conversation with the voice from heaven which he had while on the Damascus road. Luke had already reported this to Theophilus in chapter 9, but Paul now adds the fact that the bright light was seen at noon, when it outshined the sun at its brightest. When he fell to the ground, a voice asked why he was persecuting him. To accurately answer the question, Saul had to know who was speaking. Jesus then clearly identified himself. Of course, the only sense in which Saul, or Paul, persecuted Jesus was in that he persecuted the church, or Jesus' body. Paul's travelling companions were afraid.

They did not hear the voice of our Lord in the sense that they did not understand it nor obey it. However, Saul fully understood and asked what the Lord would have him to do. Jesus told him to go into the city to be told what was planned for him, both in reference to his own salvation and that of many others. Paul's companions had to lead him to Damascus because he was blind (Acts 22:6-11).

In Damascus, a devout, God-fearing man came to Paul, restored his sight and told him God had appointed him to know his will, see the righteous one and hear his voice. He further said God planned for him to be a witness to all men. Too, he told Paul to be baptized in order to have his sins washed away. The apostle then told the multitude that he returned to Jerusalem and was praying when the Lord told him to leave quickly because they would not receive his testimony. Though Paul argued with the Lord, telling him the Jews knew of his zeal, the Lord told him to depart because he would send him to the Gentiles (Acts 22:12-21).

The Reaction to Paul's Defense

So great was the Jews' hatred of the Gentiles that the very mention of them enraged the audience and moved them to call for Paul's death. They began to throw their garments and dust in the air, perhaps in preparation to stone the apostle. The chief captain had Paul taken into the castle and prepared to scourge him until he told the truth. However, Paul asked if the law would allow them to scourge an uncondemned Roman citizen. The centurion in charge of the scourging immediately told the chief captain, who, in turn, asked if Paul was a Roman. Paul's positive response moved the captain to say he had bought those privileges for a great sum of money. Paul said he was born into Roman citizenship.

With that established, everyone quickly withdrew and the captain worried because he had bound a Roman. The next day, Paul was freed and the chief priests and all the council were commanded to come together, while Paul was seated before them (Acts 22:22-30).

Paul's Second Defense

As he stood before the council, or Sanhedrin, Paul told them he had lived in good until that very time (Compare 1 Corinthians 4:4; 2 Timothy 1:3). At this, Ananias commanded the man next to Paul to strike him, which was a violation of their law. Paul, likely with the voice of prophecy, told Ananias that God would strike him because he sat to judge the apostle by the law but violated it by having a man struck before he had been tried and found guilty (Deuteronomy 25:1-2). Coffman says Ananias was murdered by his own people just a few years later at the beginning of the Jewish war. Those standing by asked Paul if he was reviling the high priest, who, of course, was one with certain authority. It might seem improbable that the apostle could fail to recognize the high priest. However, since the Sanhedrin was not in formal assembly, Ananias may not have had on official dress. Further, Ananias may not have been the actual high priest at that time, since the title was also used for former high priests and those who were merely from the family out of which he was chosen. Once the apostle knew who he spoke against, he immediately apologized noting that it was against the law to speak against a ruler of God's people (Acts 23:1-5; Exodus 22:28).

When Paul saw the council was comprised of both Pharisees and Sadducees, he began his defense by saying he was a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee and brought up on charges because of his belief in the resurrection of the dead. Actually, this was the center piece of the gospel, the resurrection of Jesus Christ. His statement immediately created a division between the Pharisees, who believed in the resurrection and the Sadducees, who did not. Some of the scribes who were Pharisees actually stood up and said they could not find any fault in Paul, even wondering if the apostle had been spoken to by a spirit or an angel. The dissention between the two groups was so great that the chief captain had Paul withdrawn to the castle, afraid he would be torn apart by them (Acts 23:6-10).

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you suppose the chief captain was surprised when Paul spoke to him?
2. Briefly relate Paul's Jewish background.
3. Explain how the Damascus Road changed Paul. Was his zeal for God lessened?
4. To whom did Jesus say Paul would go? What was the reaction of the Jews to this?
5. Tell the basic beliefs of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. What truth did Paul state which completely divided the council?

Lesson 27

Paul Before Felix

Acts 23:11-24:21

The Lord Protected Paul From the Jews

With all the hostility the Jews had shown him since his arrival in Jerusalem, Paul may have doubted if he would ever escape that city and fulfill his desire to preach in Rome. The Lord appeared to him at night and encouraged him to continue to be of good cheer, which is the meaning of the imperative used in Acts 23:11, according to Lenski. The Lord assured the apostle that he would get to give the same testimony in Rome as he had in Jerusalem.

The next morning, more than forty Jews took an oath to neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul. Bruce believes their vow may have been something like the following, "So may God do to us, and more also, if we eat or drink until we have killed Paul." He also noted that the "Mishnah makes provision for relief from such vows as could not be fulfilled 'by reason of constraint.'" The forty plus men reported their plan to the chief priests and elders and enlisted their help in the conspiracy by asking time to get the captain to bring Paul before the council again on the pretext of more thoroughly judging his case. They hoped to kill Paul as he was being brought from the barracks to the council meeting place (Acts 23:12-15).

God, in his providence, had Paul's sister's son in a position to hear the plot. He then entered into the barracks where the apostle was being kept and informed him of the intention of the conspirators. Paul immediately called for a centurion and asked him to take his nephew to the chief captain. The centurion did just as requested and brought this young man to the commander. The fact that he took the young man by the hand may indicate how young he really was. At any rate, the commander asked Paul's nephew what he had to tell him. He revealed the entire plot against his uncle. The chief captain then asked him to tell no one what he had reported to him in private and let the young man go (Acts 23:16-22).

Paul Sent to Felix

The chief captain, whose name was Claudius Lysias, immediately called two centurions to him. He commanded them to ready 200 soldiers, 70 horsemen and 200 spearmen to escort Paul to Caesarea. Their departure time was the third hour of the night, or 9 p.m. They were also instructed to provide mounts for Paul and take him to the governor, Felix, who occupied much the same position as Pilate had in Christ's day. Coffman reports, "The epitaph which history has written by his name is this: 'With savagery and lust, he exercised the powers of a king with the disposition of a slave.'" Since we know Festus took his place in 59 A.D. and Paul was with him two years, we would conclude Paul was sent to him in 57 A.D.

Lysias, according to Luke, sent a letter to Felix. Luke reported the gist of its contents, noting that Lysias slightly embellished the story, as he told Felix that he learned Paul was a Roman and so saved him from the mob. He also wrote that, in his opinion, Paul had done nothing worthy of either prison or death. Since he had learned of the conspiracy to murder Paul, Lysias informed Felix that he sent the apostle to him and commanded the Jews to appear before the governor to present their case.

The soldiers took Paul and the letter and marched between 12 and 16 miles to Antipatris. The next day, the soldiers and spearmen returned to their barracks and the horsemen went with Paul to Caesarea, some 26 miles further north. They presented Paul to the governor, along with the letter. Felix asked what province Paul was from. After the apostle told him he was from Cilicia, he told him he would hear from him after his accusers came. Paul was then kept in Herod's Praetorium, or palace (Acts 23:23-35).

The Jews Present the Case Against Paul

After five days, the high priest, elders and an orator, or, as Ash says was the case, an attorney, presented themselves before the governor to bring a formal charge against Paul. The orator, Tertullus, flattered Felix in referring to the peace he had brought the land under Roman authority, while also failing to mention the fact that the governor had been responsible for the murder of the high priest, Jonathan. Tertullus promised to state his case briefly, so as not to infringe on Felix time.

He accused Paul (1) of being a plague, (2) of stirring up rebellion among the Jews throughout the world, (3) of being a ringleader of the Nazarene party among the Jews, and (4) trying to desecrate the temple. He urged Felix to "examine" Paul, which may mean by scourging, without mentioning the apostle's Roman citizenship. The high priest and elders affirmed the truthfulness of the case presented by their orator (Acts 24:1-9).

Paul's Defense Before Felix

Once the governor nodded to him, Paul began his defense. He expressed pleasure at getting to state his case before one who had years of experience in judging on matters involving the Jews. In answer to (1), the apostle noted he had only been back in Judea for 12 days, with the last 5 of those being spent in custody. It would have been hard to be a plague in such a short time. They had not found him in the temple either disputing with others or stirring up the crowd, as was suggested in (2), so there was neither time nor evidence of rebellion against Rome, which even Felix knew the Jews would have welcomed. Paul also said they could not prove their charge of (4) trying to desecrate the temple. However, concerning (3), he did worship God according to the Way, which his Jewish accusers called a sect, or party. Coffman notes, "Implicit in such a name is the trueness and rightness of it. There are many ways of sin, but only one way of eternal life."

Paul did plead guilty to worshipping the God of the Jewish fathers and believing all that was written in the law of Moses and the prophets. He readily admitted that he based his hope in God, as his accusers also did, who would raise both the righteous and wicked from the dead. Because of that belief, Paul said he tried to live as his conscience directed, so he would not offend God or man. After some five years in other parts of the world, Paul had returned to Jerusalem with a gift for the needy of the Jewish nation. Instead of profaning the temple, they found him there after he had completed his vow of purification. The apostle suggested that the Asian Jews who brought the original charges against him, and stirred up the mob, should have been present to refute the facts which he presented. He even invited those Sadducean accusers who were present to step forward and show the error in his one statement before the Sanhedrin, "Concerning the resurrection of the dead I am being judged by you this day" (Acts 24:10-21).

Discussion Questions

1. What reassurance did the Lord give to Paul?
2. Describe the vow taken by 40 Jews. How did the Lord protect Paul?
3. To whom did Claudius Lysias next send Paul? Describe the apostle's escort and the letter they carried.
4. What basic accusations did Tertullus bring against Paul?
5. Briefly relate Paul's answer to each charge.

Lesson 28

Appealing to Caesar

Acts 24:22-25:27

Paul Before Felix and Drusilla

Luke told Theophilus that Felix had a fairly good knowledge of "the Way," or Christianity. After all, Philip and his four daughters lived in Caesarea and Cornelius had been converted while residing in the city. Rather than ruling immediately, Felix delayed judgment until Lysias came to give his testimony. This may merely have been a delaying tactic intended to illicit a bribe from the Christians. He did direct the centurion in charge of Paul to grant him basic freedom to be with his friends and have someone attend to his needs.

When Felix returned to Caesarea with his third wife Drusilla, who was one of the three daughters of Herod Agrippa I, he called for Paul to come tell him more about "the faith in Christ." The apostle presented the case for righteous living and judgment, along with consideration of the importance of self-control in such living. He also warned of the coming judgment, in which every man will be judged based upon his works (2 Corinthians 5:10). The discussion terrified Felix and moved him to send Paul away, while saying he would call for him again at a more convenient time. It is not known if that time ever came. Historians do tell us that after Felix removal from office, Drusilla and their son, Agrippa, perished in the eruption of Vesuvius. Felix did call for Paul to come converse with him often, secretly hoping to receive a bribe to release him. After two years of waiting, Felix was relieved by Festus. Felix left Paul in bonds in an effort to earn some special favor from the Jews (Acts 24:22-27).

Paul's Appeal to Caesar

After only three days in the province, Porcius Festus went to Jerusalem. There, the high priest and some of the members of the Sanhedrin approached him about bringing Paul up to Jerusalem for a trial. They actually intended to have Paul assassinated along the road. Festus said Paul would remain in Caesarea, where he would shortly go himself. He urged those in authority to come present their charges before him there. In just eight to ten days, Festus went to Caesarea, sat on the judgment seat and called for Paul to be brought before him. The Jews, who may have journeyed with Festus, also appeared before the judgment seat and brought serious charges against Paul. The apostle, according to Luke, simply said he had not sinned against the Jews, the temple or Caesar.

Festus, in an effort to establish good relations with the Jews, asked Paul if he would appear before him in Jerusalem to be judged. Paul answered that he had done no wrong, as Festus well knew, and, as a Roman citizen, would remain before Caesar's judgment seat. He said he was willing to die if guilty of some offense worthy of death but would not be given up to the Jews if innocent. So, he appealed to Caesar. Festus consulted with his own legal advisors and said Paul would go before Caesar as requested (Acts 25:1-12).

Festus Introduces Paul and the Jews' Case Against Him

The King Agrippa Luke says came to greet Festus is actually Herod Agrippa II. His father was Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12:1-23) and his great-grandfather was Herod the Great (Matthew 2:1-18). Bernice was his sister. She, at the age of sixteen, had already been married twice. First to Alexander of Alexandria and then to her uncle, Herod, King of Chalcis, who died in 48 A. D. At the time of this writing, she was living with her brother. Later, she served as mistress to both Vespasian and his son Titus, who probably would have married her if there had not been such an outrage among the people.

During Agrippa's stay, Festus brought Paul's case up for consideration. The elders of the Jews did not ask for a trial, but a guilty verdict. Festus said he told them Roman law did not ordinarily allow a man to be condemned without having an opportunity to answer his accusers face to face. Then the Jews came, Festus found no sufficient charge of evil but, as he saw it, a religious (the actual word meaning a question of demon worship) dispute over Paul's affirmation that Jesus had been dead but was now alive. Festus then reported that he asked Paul to go to answer the questions in Jerusalem so that he could better understand the question involved, but that seems doubtful since he had already told Agrippa he had not found Paul guilty of any of matter involving Roman law. It is more likely that he was seeking to establish a favorable relationship with the Jews when Paul's appeal to Caesar forced him to hold Paul for a higher court.

Agrippa immediately expressed an interest in hearing Paul, which Festus readily granted. The next day, Festus, Agrippa and Bernice all appeared in very formal attire, with the chief captains and important men of the city all in attendance. Paul was brought in and Festus introduced him as the man the Jews sought to have put to death in suits brought in Jerusalem and at Caesarea. Though Festus announced publicly that he had found no guilt in Paul, his actions had forced the apostle to appeal to Caesar. Perhaps his hesitation was God's opening of the door to the most powerful court in the world of that day! So, needing some formal charge of wrong doing against Paul, Festus announced he had brought him before Agrippa for an examination (Acts 25:13-27).

Discussion Questions

1. Using Paul's discussion with Felix as a model, what key points about the faith would you present to one who made inquiry?
2. What do you think drove Paul to appeal to Caesar?
3. Briefly tell about Agrippa and Bernice.
4. How did Festus assess the whole problem between the Jews and Paul? Explain why you think such was accurate or inaccurate.
5. Explain how God might have used Festus to get Paul into the court of Caesar. How do you think these incidents relate to the Lord's answer to Ananias in Acts 9:15-16?

Lesson 29

Paul's Defense Before Agrippa

Acts 26:1-32

Paul Tells Agrippa About his Early Life

Though Festus had the full authority of Rome behind him, it was Agrippa who told Paul he was permitted to speak. Paul stretched out his hand and began by saying he was happy to make his defense before the king, especially because Agrippa would have been familiar with Jewish teachings and customs. He begged the king to be patient, apparently planning to speak at some length.

Though born in the city of Tarsus, Paul stressed that he was brought up in Jerusalem and was well known among the Jews. Some of his accusers may well have remembered the zealous young Pharisee from his school days and time as a persecutor. He told Agrippa that he was now being judged "for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers," a likely reference to the promised Messiah. Of course, the hope that Messiah brought was of the resurrection of the dead. Paul argued that this very hope was sought by all the tribes of Israel. In fact, he said their daily earnest service was based upon that very hope. Yet, Paul claimed the essence of that hope was the basis of the Jews' accusations against him! The apostle simply asked King Agrippa, "Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead?" This question seems to show that his accusers were primarily of the Sadducees (Acts 26:1-8).

Paul's Description of His Actions as a Persecutor

When Paul took actions to stop the teachings about Jesus and His followers, he was directed by his conscience. Just as Agrippa's family had pursued an end to the life of Jesus, Paul had pursued an end to the teachings of Jesus. Many of those set apart for God's service, or saints, were shut up in prison in Jerusalem because of Paul's actions. When Luke reports that Paul said, "and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them," it appears the apostle is saying he voted to condemn them as a member of the Sanhedrin. He further said that he punished them in every synagogue, even going to cities outside Jerusalem, in an effort to get them to speak against the name of Jesus (Acts 26:9-11).

Paul's Account of His Conversion and Life Following

On his way to Damascus in pursuit of more Christians, Paul reported that he saw a great light, which was brighter than the sun, coming out of heaven at midday and surrounding the persecutor and his companions. After the group had fallen to the ground, a voice spoke to him in Hebrew, saying, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads." Naturally, Paul asked the Voice to identify Himself. He identified Himself as Jesus of Nazareth and told Paul to stand up because He intended for him to minister and witness for Him both as to the things he had seen and would see. The Lord promised to protect Paul from harm coming either from the Jews or the Gentiles, to whom he was being sent. The apostle's purpose was going to be to open their

eyes to their own sinfulness, means of receiving remission and the great inheritance available to those set apart by their faith in Jesus (Acts 26:12-18).

Naturally, Paul could not disobey a voice from heaven, so he preached the gospel in Damascus and Jerusalem, both to the Jews and Gentiles. Notice, his preaching included the necessity of repentance, a turning toward God and living a life showing the works of repentance. Such preaching enraged the Jews and caused them to seize him in the temple and try to kill him. It was only by God's help, according to Paul, that he was still alive to tell Agrippa that Moses and the prophets had said the Christ would suffer, rise from the dead and spread the good news among Jews and Gentiles (Acts 26:19-23).

Agrippa's Response

Festus interrupted with a loud declaration that Paul had gone crazy from too much learning. It seems Paul's failure to defend himself, instead focussing on converting his judges, was incomprehensible to the governor. Paul responded with proper respect for Festus' position, simply saying he was not crazy but spoke the truth. The apostle went on to note that the events surrounding and following Jesus' life were done in the open for all to see and had to be well known to King Agrippa. The apostle then asked Agrippa if he believed the prophets. Paul answered for him, perhaps sensing, or through the Spirit knowing, what the King was thinking. Of course he believed the prophets.

Agrippa recognized that Paul was using a concise argument intended to persuade him to follow Jesus as the Christ. Paul expressed his true desire that Agrippa, along with everyone else who heard his voice, would be converted to the point of zealously following the Lord just as he did. Agrippa, Festus and Bernice then rose and left the room. Their judgment was clear, Paul had done nothing worthy of death or chains. King Agrippa stated that Paul could have been released had it not have been for his appeal for the case to be heard by Caesar (Acts 26:24-32).

Discussion Questions

1. Briefly describe Paul's life prior to his conversion.
2. Discuss ways we might cast our vote against Christ today.
3. In what way could it be said that Paul persecuted Jesus? What encouragement can be found in this for those who wear Christ's name today?
4. What purpose do you think Paul had in his speech? What desire did he have for his listeners?
5. Do you have a similar purpose and desire for others? How could you show it better than you have in the past?

Lesson 30

Paul's Journey to Rome

Acts 27:1-28:31

Travelling in a Ship of Adramyttium

Though no guilt had been ascribed to Paul, he had appealed to Caesar. So, Festus, along with Agrippa and Bernice, delivered the apostle and some other prisoners into the hands of a centurion named Julius. Luke went along on this journey to Italy and noted the officer was of the Augustan Regiment, which Ash says was a tenth part of a legion of 6,000 soldiers. The ship they boarded was either flagged out of Adramyttium, located in northwest Turkey, or it was bound there. In either case, Luke told Theophilus that Aristarchus, whose home was in Thessalonica, was with them (Acts 27:1-2; 19:29; 20:4; Colossians 4:10).

Their first stop was in Sidon, where Julius gave Paul the special privilege of visiting his friends and being refreshed by them. Rather than sailing due west against the wind, the ship's captain sailed northward, using Cyprus as a shelter. The next stop, Myra in Lycia, was frequently used as a port in the Egyptian wheat trade, so Julius looked for a ship bound for Rome (Acts 27:3-5).

Traveling in an Alexandrian Ship

The ship Julius found was out of Alexandria and bound for Italy. Likely, this ship was part of a large, government regulated, commercial fleet of ships which carried much needed grain to the world's capitol. Julius, Paul and the rest of their company boarded that ship. It sailed, against a late summer, northwesterly wind, for the port of Cnidus. The wind was so unfavorable that the captain sailed along the southern shore of Crete. When they finally reached the port of Fair Havens, near the city of Lasea, a decision had to be made as to the course to be pursued.

Luke noted that the Fast, or Day of Atonement, was now over, so it was around October 1. Paul advised them not to attempt further travel at such a dangerous time of year. In fact, Bruce says "the Mediterranean was not safe for ancient vessels after September 15 until about March 15." The apostle's concern was not just for the cargo but also the lives of those on board. Yet, Julius was inclined to listen more closely to the words of the ship's pilot and the owner than to Paul. The majority of those on board hoped to reach Phoenix and its more accommodating harbor (Acts 27:6-12).

Troubled Seas

When a soft, south wind began to blow, it was assumed they could easily reach Phoenix within a day, so they set sail. Apparently, they made good headway as they travelled along close to shore. However, a northeaster blew up and ended all hope of reaching a safe harbor as they had to let the ship be driven by the will of the wind. When the ship reached the shelter of an island called Clauda, the sailors, with the help of Luke and some other passengers, secured the skiff which had likely been allowed to trail the ship because they planned to use it to go ashore at Phoenix. The sailors passed cables under the ship to strengthen it against the stormy sea and let the ship drift without aid of sail for fear of being shipwrecked on the shoal west of Cyrene, which was called Syrtis.

The violent seas continued the next day, so the sailors began to throw the cargo overboard. The following day, they threw the tackle overboard as well. Since they could not see the sun or stars, navigation was impossible and crew and passengers gave up hope of living. At this point, Paul reminded them of his earlier warning, possibly to give more credibility to his next words, and then began to reassure them. He said the ship would be lost but God, through an angel, had promised to answer his prayers by saving every life on board. He did tell them they would run aground on an island.

On the fourteenth night, as they were tossed about in the Adriatic Sea, the sailors sensed they were coming close to land. They took soundings and, realizing they might hit the rocks, cast four anchors off the stern and prayed for daylight. The sailors let down the skiff as they pretended to put out more anchors. However, Paul warned Julius that he could not be saved without the sailors on board, so the centurion commanded his soldiers to cut away the ropes to the skiff and let it fall away. Just before dawn, Paul urged all on board to eat and reassured them not one hair on their heads would be harmed. While they all watched, he took some bread, prayed and began to eat. They were encouraged and all 276 on board likewise ate. They then cast the rest of the grain overboard (Acts 27:13-38).

Shipwrecked!

As day broke, it became clear why Paul had said the sailors needed to stay on board. Though they did not recognize the land which stood nearby, they did know how to guide the ship toward a bay with a beach which they could see. They let go of the anchors, cut loose the rudders' ropes and hoisted the mainsail. Before the ship reached shore, it stuck fast in a sandbar formed by the swirling waters caused by the merging of two seas. The prow stuck firm but the stern began to break apart in the rough seas. The soldiers wanted to kill the prisoners so that none could escape, but Luke says Julius wanted to save Paul so he forbid this course of action. Instead, all who could swim were told to make their way to shore while the rest used boards and broken pieces of ship to help them float ashore. Just as God's angel had promised, not a single life was lost (Acts 27:39-44)!

They soon discovered the island's name was Malta. The natives, who were descendants of Phoenicia, did not speak Greek, but they did show considerable kindness to those recently shipwrecked. Paul helped gather sticks to lay on the fire they had built. A viper, upon feeling the heat of the fire, latched onto the apostle's arm. Paul shook it off into the fire. The superstitious islanders believed he must truly have been guilty since a snake bit him after he had survived the sea. When he did not die, they decided he was a god.

They, perhaps meaning the centurion and ship's officers, along with Paul and his company, were invited to stay at the house of the chief man of the island, whose name was Publius. He entertained them for three days, during which time Paul healed Publius' father of a fever and dysentery by praying and laying his hands on him. Naturally, others who were sick were also brought to the apostle and he healed them. They bestowed honor on the apostle while he was with them and sent the whole company on their way with adequate provisions (Acts 28:1-10).

Paul's Completes His Journey to Rome!

They set sail aboard another Alexandrian ship after three months, likely after the worst of the winter storms were over. Their first stop was at Syracuse, then Rhegium and, finally, Puteoli. This was the principle port of call for ships carrying wheat from Egypt to Rome. They found brethren there and stayed with them for seven days. Then, they went on to Rome. Brethren from the city heard Paul was coming and travelled some 43 miles to greet him at the Market of

Appius and others met him at the Three Taverns. Seeing them caused the apostle to thank God and gave him courage to go on. In Rome, Paul was permitted to live with a guard by himself (Acts 28:11-16).

After three days in Rome, Paul called for the leaders of the Jews. He explained to them that he was in Rome because of charges brought against him by their brethren in Jerusalem. The authorities had wanted to release him, but he had to appeal to Caesar because the Jews were opposed to Paul being at liberty. The apostle remained chained, as he explained, because of following Christ, the true fulfillment of Israel's hope. The leaders of the Jews in Rome knew nothing of the charges against Paul and reported that no one had come from Jerusalem. However, they did express their desire to hear from Paul concerning Christianity, which they said was spoken against "everywhere."

On the appointed day, a large group returned and Paul preached all day using Moses and the prophets to testify concerning God's kingdom. The group was divided as to whether to believe Paul. He finally spoke one word, which Coffman suggests was "Gentiles," which ended all discussion. Paul quoted from Isaiah 6:9-10 to show their rejection of the gospel had been foretold by the Holy Spirit. The apostle then told them that salvation would be taken to the Gentiles and there find a good reception.

Luke reports that Paul spent two years in his own rented house. He received guests there and taught concerning the kingdom of God. He spoke boldly and no one forbid him to continue (Acts 28:17-31).

Discussion Questions

1. Why did Julius choose to sail on despite Paul's warnings? Explain the similar desires present today when we ignore God's warnings.
2. For what did Paul pray? What answer did he report and how was it received?
3. Through what means did God achieve the promised results? Could this have been accomplished without a miracle?
4. What miraculous occurrences happened while Paul was on the island?
5. Why do you think so many of the Jews consistently rejected the preaching of the gospel?

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