

The Acts of the Apostles

The Book of The Acts has been a puzzle to many students. It seems to end on a most unsatisfactory note: with Paul imprisoned. It says nothing about the subsequent history of either Peter or Paul, though it records their doings almost exclusively. Its author was Luke, and he wrote for Theophilus, who may have been the Ethiopian Eunuch whose conversion is recorded in the eighth chapter.

But why did Luke end the book on such an unsatisfactory note?

We suggest that he did not intend to write a biography of Peter or Paul, but rather an exposition of how Yahweh, in mercy, made one final offer of grace to the Jewish nation before overwhelming it in A.D.70.

When Jesus hung from the stake, he pleaded with his Father to overlook the crime of the people on the grounds that they knew not what they did (Luke 23:34). Consequently, the preaching of the Apostles, brought the enormity of the crime clearly home to the people. Time and again they were told that they had murdered their Messiah (Acts 2:23; 3:14-15; 7:52), though it was conceded that "through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers" (Ch. 3:17).

The Apostles were sent forth to witness to that fact, and they did so "first" to the Jews, and only then to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46). Accordingly, Paul made it his practise to seek out cities where there were synagogues, and to preach first in them.

Why did he do this? Why was it a principle to offer the Gospel "first to the Jews" and only afterwards to the Gentiles? We do not follow that principle today in preaching; but why not if it were then necessary?

Because, the gospel having been officially rejected by the Jews both in the land and in dispersion, the requirement no longer is necessary. This act of grace to the nation of Israel was in answer to the Lord's request upon the cross, and when it was completed (as it was by Paul in Rome), Luke brought his book to an end.

The Acts of the Apostles, therefore, primarily records how that Yahweh answered the plea of His Son by providing a final opportunity for the Jewish nation to accept Jesus as Messiah, and how, when this was rejected, it was preached to the Gentiles. Paul completed the appeal to the Jews by his defence in Jerusalem, and his approach to the leaders of the dispersion in Rome, on which note the book appropriately concludes.

When the Acts of the Apostles is considered in that light, it will be found to be a complete and satisfactory treatise.

The stoning of Stephen by the Sanhedrin, after his masterly and irrefutable exposition, constituted the final National rejection of Yahweh's appeal. The people in the land had officially spurned the offer of mercy, and the preaching of the Gospel was transferred to different centres — Samaria and then to Gentile lands.

It is significant, that as he was dying, Stephen repeated the prayer that Christ had uttered from the stake, with one notable exception: he did not say, "they know not what they do" — his exposition had clearly revealed to them the enormity of their crime. Their action was a blatant repudiation of God's goodness.

So much for the Jews in the land. But then Paul conveyed the same message to those of the dispersion. Consider his first recorded speech, and how he presented to the Jews abroad the same message of the ignorance of their rulers in crucifying Christ, as had Peter to those of Jerusalem (Acts 13:27-28). Paul urged that the offer of repentance had now been sent to the Jews of the dispersion (v.26). Why should this address be recorded, whereas others were not? Because it comprised Paul's policy speech to synagogues everywhere.

Consistent with this thought, Paul's first action on arriving at Rome was to call together the elders of the Jewish community in that city, and place before them these facts. They rejected his message, and Paul warned: "The salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and they will hear it" (Acts 28:28). On that note, the book closes. No longer was it necessary that the word of God should first be preached to Jews (Acts 13:46), for they had officially refused it. Thus today we proclaim it almost entirely to Gentiles.

It is significant that Paul had a desire to visit Jerusalem and Rome, the capitals of the Jewish and Gentile worlds. In both cities he laid before the Jews the facts of their rejection of Messiah, and the requirements of salvation, and on their rejection of them he turned to the Gentiles. The great witness to the Jewish people consequent upon the prayer of Christ in which he pleaded their ignorance had come to an end.



Theme Verse

Acts 1:8 epitomises the whole book: "Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." The book shows how that from Jerusalem, the Truth extended into Judea, up to Samaria, and was taken by Paul and others to the uttermost part of the earth. The book can thus be divided into the following five main headings, with numerous sub-headings:

(1): PREPARATION FOR PREACHING — Acts 1:1-2:4.

Christ's instruction and commission to the Apostles	Acts 1:1-8
The Angelic Message of Promise and Hope	1:9-11
Period of Prayer and waiting in Jerusalem	1:12-14
Appointment of Matthias to Apostleship	1:15-26
Pentecostal outpouring of Holy Spirit	2:1-4

(2): PREACHING IN JERUSALEM — Acts 2:5-7:60

The first impression	2:5-13
The first message	2:14-47
The first miracle	3:1-11
The first opposition	3:12-4:4
The first defence	4:5-12
The first deliverance	4:13-22
The first relief	4:23-31
The first love and unity	4:32-37
The first discipline	5:1-11
The first Apostolic authority	5:12-16
The first persecution	5:17-42
The first organisation	6:1-7
The first martyr	6:8-7:60

(3): PREACHING IN JUDEA AND SAMARIA — Acts 8:1-25.

The scattered witnesses	8:1-4
Samaria receives the Word	8:5-25

(4): TO THE UTTERMOST PARTS OF EARTH — Acts 8:26-28:31.

Towards Africa — Ch. 8:26-40.	
Conversion of the Ethiopian Eunuch	8:26-40
Towards Asia — Ch. 9:1 - 16:5	
Saul: The instrument found	9:1-31
Peter: Authority confirmed by miracle	9:32-43
Door opened to Gentiles	10:1-48
Preaching to Gentiles defended by Peter	11:1-18

The spread of the Gospel through persecution	11:19-30
Opposition of Authorities successfully defied	12:1-24
Paul: The instrument commissioned	12:25-13:4
Paul: The instrument used	13:5-14:28
The council at Jerusalem	15:1-35
The separation of Barnabas and Paul	15:36-16:5

Towards Europe — Ch. 16:6 - 18:8.

The call to Macedonia	16:6-13
Lydia and the Jailor converted (Philippi)	16:14-40
Thessalonica, Berea, Athens	17:1-34
Corinth	18:1-17

In Asia — Ch. 18:18 - 23:26

Ephesus	18:18-21
Visiting Ecclesias	18:22-23
Ephesus	18:24-19:41
Three months in Greece	20:1-6
Troas	20:7-12
To Jerusalem	20:13-21:16
In Jerusalem	21:17-23:30
In Caesarea	23:31-26:32

In Europe — Ch. 27:1 - 28:31

By ship to Italy	27:1-28:15
In Rome	28:16-31



TWOFOLD DIVISION OF ACTS

The book of Acts can be divided into two main sections, the first of which records the preaching of the Gospel throughout Palestine, and the second, the proclaiming of it throughout the world. A close examination will reveal a remarkable repetition of experiences.

Part One — Chapters 1 to 12.

Part Two — Chapters 13 to 28.

Jerusalem the centre	Antioch the centre
Peter the chief figure	Paul the chief figure
Taken out to Samaria	Taken out to Rome
Rejected by the Jews of the land	Rejected by the Jews of the Dispersion
Peter imprisoned	Paul imprisoned.



PETER AND PAUL : A PARALLEL

See Heb. 2:4

Peter

Paul

First address	Ch. 2	First address	Ch. 13
Lame man healed	Ch. 3	Lame man healed	Ch. 14
Simon the Sorcerer	Ch. 8	Elymas the Sorcerer	Ch. 13
Influence of shadow	Ch. 5	Influence of handkerchiefs	Ch. 19
Laying on of hands	Ch. 8	Laying on of hands	Ch. 19
Peter worshipped	Ch. 10	Paul worshipped	Ch. 14
Tabitha raised	Ch. 9	Eutychus raised	Ch. 20
Peter imprisoned	Ch. 12	Paul imprisoned	Ch. 28

Thus the signs and wonders performed by Peter in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, were repeated by Paul when he took the Gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth.

The Acts Of The Apostles (Chapter Subjects).

YAHWEH'S FINAL OFFER TO THE NATION OF ISRAEL

Theme verses — Acts 1:8; 13:46. Compare with Luke 23:34.

(1) — FINAL OFFER TO THE JEWS OF THE LAND — Chapters 1-12.

- CHAP. 1 — Apostles prepared and commissioned.
- CHAP. 2 — Miracle - Witness - Response.
- CHAP. 3 — Miracle (lame man healed) - Witness - Opposition.
- CHAP. 4 — Miracle (release from prison) - Witness - Opposition.
- CHAP. 5 — Discipline - Witness - Opposition.
- CHAPS. 6, 7 — Miracle - Witness - Opposition.
- CHAP. 8 — Samaria - Ethiopian chancellor.
- CHAP. 9 — Conversion Paul.
- CHAP. 10 — Cornelius baptised.
- CHAP. 11 — Antioch — the new centre.
- CHAP. 12 — James executed - Peter delivered - Herod judged as head of nation.

(2) — FINAL OFFER TO THE JEWS OF THE DISPERSION — Chpts. 13-28.

- CHAP. 13, 14 — First missionary journey.
- CHAP. 15:1-35 — Jerusalem Conference.
- CHAP. 15:36 - 18:23 — Second missionary journey.
- CHAP. 18:24-28 — Powerful preaching of Apollos (Corinth).
- CHAP. 19:1 - 22:30 — Third journey and final rejection of Jews of Jerusalem.
- CHAP. 23 — Paul witnesses before the Sanhedrin.
- CHAP. 24 — Paul witnesses before Governor Felix.
- CHAP. 25 — Paul witnesses before Governor Festus.
- CHAP. 26 — Paul witnesses before King Agrippa.
- CHAP. 27 — On the way to Rome — Witness on the ship.
- CHAP. 28 — In Rome and final rejection by Jews.

SUMMARY OF THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

This book is really "Book 2" of which the Gospel by Luke is "Book 1." It begins where the first book ends, at the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and then goes on to describe the various stages by which Christianity spread over the whole civilised world, and was formed into an organised Ecclesia. In the first half of the book the writer deals with the growth of the infant Ecclesia under the care of Peter, James and John, and in the latter half confines his attention to the activities of "Saul of Tarsus" (afterwards called Paul), the great apostle to the Gentiles. By three wonderful journeys he established the Truth throughout the Roman Empire, which terminated in his arrest and subsequent imprisonment at Rome. The expression "we" often occurs in the narrative, especially in chapters 16, 20, 21, 27, 28, showing that the writer (Luke) was personally engaged in the incidents there described.

The Early Life of Saul

The martyrdom of Stephen introduces us to one of the greatest men who ever lived: the Apostle Paul. In whatever circumstances we find him, he reveals earnestness and dedication. He does so, even before his conversion to Christ. Then he was devoted to Judaism, and his complete absorption in that system of religion blinded him to all else. He listened to Stephen, and must have been impressed with all that he heard, but doubtless, like so many others, there was one stubborn fact he could not overcome: Jesus had been crucified; and God's law cursed any Jew that "hung upon a tree." Would the promised Messiah be cursed of God? A thousand times no, every Judaiser would argue. Therefore, whilst he may have been impressed with Stephen's defence, there was nothing in it that overcame Paul's prejudice; Stephen was mistaken. Later, of course, he learned that it was he who made the mistake, and then tried to do all in his power to redeem himself in the sight of God and Christ. Repeatedly he referred to the sad incident of the murder of Stephen in the most touching manner. See Acts 22:20, 26:10; 1 Cor. 15:9; Gal. 1:13; 1 Tim. 1:13. In The Story Of The Bible, we will attempt to trace the life of Saul, called Paul, from its earliest beginnings.

His Birth

It is impossible to state with perfect accuracy the date of either of the birth or death of the Apostle Paul, though both may be inferred within narrow limits. He is first mentioned, on the occasion of Stephen's martyrdom, at which time he is called "a young man." The Greek word *neanias* could apply to one who was thirty years of age, and as he was almost immediately afterwards sent on an important mission, it may be concluded that he was then thirty.

The martyrdom of Stephen probably took place early in A.D.36, and as the Lord was 33 in the year 30, when he ascended into heaven, Saul would have been about six years younger than the Lord Jesus.

Jesus was brought up in the obscure and isolated village of Nazareth, but Saul had his upbringing in Tarsus (Acts 22:3), a city of great importance in the ancient world.

Tarsus was a sophisticated, busy, university city, standing in the fer-

tile plain at the foot of the snow-tipped chain of Taurus mountains that overshadowed it, and with the bright, swift stream of the river Cyndus flowing through it. It was a centre of commercial enterprise and political power, for the ancient coins of the city represent her as seated amid bales of various merchandise.

Paul was a freeborn Roman citizen, but dwelling in the university city of Tarsus, he also was familiar with Greek philosophy. Thus he combined all the attributes needed for universal travel and preaching of the Gospel. By birth he was a Roman, by education he was a Greek, and by religion he was a Jew. From the very beginning, in birth, teaching, and worship, he was prepared for the work that God had in store for him from his birth. Later, Paul came to realise this, and gave expression to it in his letter to the Galatians (Gal. 1:15). As one writer has stated:

"Many apparently opposite qualities went to make up the special fitness of Paul for his great life-work. He com-

bined in his own unique experience, a personal connection of the closest kind with the three principal social spheres of his age. He was called out of the very heart of Judaism. Jewish legalism he knew from end to end. He was called out of the very heart of Greek culture, for he lived his early life from infancy in one of the great centres of Hellenic life, and was familiarised with all that was great and noble in Greek literature. He had, moreover, enjoyed from birth all the various privileges of Roman citizenship. He was thus a Hebrew to the backbone; he was a Greek in the fullest sense by education; and he was a Roman citizen free-born."

Education

His early education was obtained in Tarsus. It seems to have included something of Greek culture, as well as Judaism. As a young boy, he would be required to learn by heart long passages of the Scriptures, and to study and expound such books as Leviticus. This memorising of Scripture later stood him in good stead, enabling him to quote freely in support of his teaching.

It was also incumbent upon every Jewish boy to learn a trade. Tarsus was noted for the weaving of goats' hair, which was used for making ropes, garments and tents. Young Saul learned the trade of a tent-maker, and here, again, is seen the providence of Yahweh. The knowledge of this trade not only enabled him to "pay his way" when he later took on the work of preaching, but was a mechanical sort of work, which could be plied in such a way as to leave the mind entirely free. We can well imagine Paul weaving at the tent-making, as his thoughts soared on higher matters, or else he held converse with his companions.

As he commenced his teens, he would be known as a Son of the

Commandment, and would be brought under the domination of the Law. About that time, he was sent from home to Jerusalem, to be trained at the feet of the notable teacher, Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). Perhaps he lived with his sister during this time, for we learn later that he had a married sister in Jerusalem, whose son, on one occasion, saved Paul's life (Acts 23:16).

Paul speaks of his early education in the Epistle to the Philip-pians:

"Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews" (Phil. 3:5).

A man was a Jew who traced his descent from Jacob and conformed to the religions of his fathers; but he was not a Hebrew also unless he spoke the Hebrew tongue and retained Hebrew customs (see Trench's "New Testament Synonyms"). Though Paul was born in Tarsus, he was brought up under Gamaliel in the Hebrew metropolis, and spoke the Hebrew language fluently (Acts 21:40; 22:2). Most often, in quoting from the Scriptures, he used the Hebrew text which he often translated for himself.

Saul, doubtless, would follow the normal pattern of education in a Jewish home:

"At the age of five he would begin to study the Bible with his parents at home; and even earlier than this he would doubtless have learnt the Shema and the Hallel (Psalms 113-118) in whole or in part. At six he would go to his 'vineyard,' as the later Rabbis called their schools. At ten he would begin to study those earlier and simpler developments of the oral law, which were afterwards collected in the Mishna. At thirteen he would, by a sort of 'confirmation,' become a 'Son of the Commandment.' At fifteen he

would be trained in yet more minute and burdensome 'helachoth,' analogous to those which ultimately filled the vast mass of the Gemara." (F.W.F.).

Thus, from a tender age, his attention was directed towards the Scriptures, so that he could recite them from memory; whilst, at the same time, he would be carefully tutored in the principles of Judaism.

Paul was instructed in the teaching of the Pharisees, to which he applied himself with strict attention. He became a "Pharisee of the Pharisees," very rigid in the observance of the minute details of the Law and Judaism.

Probably, it was as a *Son of the Commandment*, in his early teens, that he was sent to Jerusalem to complete his education under the guidance of Gamaliel.

Thus the two teenagers: one in Jerusalem, and the other in Nazareth, were being prepared for the work before them.

How long Paul remained in Jerusalem is not revealed, but it may have been for several years. And doubtless, even after his return to Tarsus, he periodically visited the Jewish capital for the Passover, and other feasts.

It seems inconceivable that such an enquiring, alert person as the Apostle was could have remained in ignorance of the teaching of the Lord. It was the subject of discussion among the Pharisees and the Sanhedrin (John 3:2), so that it seems inevitable that it would come before the notice of young Saul. Moreover, the presence of the Lord at Passover time, the remarkable miracles he performed in Jerusalem, and his public witness on such occasions, would not have gone unnoticed by such as Saul.

Indeed he may have been deeply impressed by the miracles, teaching and bearing of the Lord, but as with so many others, the crucifixion of Jesus stood as an insurmountable barrier to the acceptance of him as Messiah. Saul knew the Law, and realised that it cursed one who hung upon a tree. Great prophet though Jesus may have been, it was impossible, in Saul's concept of revelation, for the Christ to be cursed by God. This stubborn fact of doctrine blinded the eyes of Saul from the truth concerning Jesus.

Saul The Pharisee

The young Saul showed extreme promise in his education, and it was confidently expected by those who observed him, that he had a great future before him as a Rabbi. From the very beginning he lived according to the strictest rules of the sect (Acts 26:4). Later, he wrote to the brethren in Galatia:

"I profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers" (Gal. 1:14).

He was "blameless" in his scrupulous observance of all the requirement of the law (Phil. 3:6), following a family tradition in so doing (2 Tim. 1:3).

A severe training as a strict Pharisee does not seem the most promising preparation for the future Apostle to the Gentiles; but, in fact, it proved otherwise. If Saul had been less of a Jew, Paul the apostle would have been less bold and independent. If Yahweh had selected a Gentile for the work of evangelising Gentiles, he would not have been able to counter the great controversy of the age: jus-

tification by faith or by the works of Judaism. Once the light had come to Saul, he could detect the emptiness of the Judaistic ceremonies as well as the crushing yoke of the condemnation of the Law, for his previous education assisted him to do so. Once he saw the Truth there was no fear that such a man would ever look back, or that he would be tempted to set up again what the grace of God had overthrown (Gal 2:18).

Was Saul A Member Of The Sanhedrin?

In Acts 26:10, Paul declared that before conversion, he gave his vote against certain of the believers, so procuring their condemnation. On the basis of this, it has been suggested that Saul was a newly appointed member of the Sanhedrin, and gave his vote in that Council. But that by no means follows. If he had been a member, the fact would surely have been disclosed in his controversies with the Judaisers, or in such bio-

graphical notes as Philippians 3:5-6.

It was generally acknowledged, that before a person could be elected to the Sanhedrin, he must marry; and Paul is specific that he was unmarried (1 Cor. 9:5). This would normally disqualify him for a position on the Council as would also his youth.

Moreover, Saul's commission to attack the Ecclesia did not come from the Sanhedrin, but from the chief priests (Acts 26:10). He was possibly a member of a committee appointed for the suppression of the new teaching, and in that capacity gave his vote against those imprisoned.

That evidently was his position as he supervised the execution of Stephen, and took charge of the outer garments of the principal witnesses as they commenced to stone him. In spite of the wonderful address and prayer of that outstanding man, Saul fully approved his death.

Samaria Receives the Word

The Lord had told the Apostles that they would become his witnesses first in Jerusalem, and then in all Judea and Samaria. However, they manifested a reluctance to extend the Truth beyond Jerusalem, until persecution drove them to it. This caused believers to leave the city, and they carried with them the seeds of the truth to plant them in other centres. As yet, the Apostles did not realise that Gentiles were to be invited to participate in the grace of Yahweh on equal terms with Jews, and this had to be gradually revealed to them. The Truth was first preached to the Jews, then to the Samaritans as a mixed racial entity between Jews and Gentiles, then to a Gentile proselyte (the Ethiopian), afterwards to a sympathetic Gentile (Cornelius), and finally to an hostile world (Acts 13). Thus the Apostles were eased into preaching the Truth to Gentiles.



Saul: The Instrument Found

The time had arrived for the Gospel message to be sent forth into the Gentile world. For that purpose, an instrument was needed who would have sufficient ability and determination to perform the Divine will. The instrument was found in Saul the Pharisee. In his conversion there is revealed Christianity's greatest triumph (1 Tim 1:12-15). He was a Jew, a Roman, a scholar, an aristocrat. "Shrewder than Judas, more knowledgeable than Matthew, more ardent than Peter, he was a very volcano of a man. There lay within Saul a capacity to do anything that mortals ever did. Once his fingers took hold of a thing, it required Almighty power to prize them open." And God treated him as was necessary. In this there is a tremendous lesson. Notice how differently God dealt with the Ethiopian and the Pharisee, and yet how exactly the methods used were suited to the men involved (Acts 8 and 9). The Ethiopian was quietly reading in his chariot, filled with religious wonder at the mysterious Word which challenged his attention (Acts 9:31). He was a man ready for, and receptive to, the Truth, and he immediately responded to the moving appeal of the words spoken to him. The Pharisee was a man of dynamic energy which had been aroused into a fury of action by his hatred of Christianity. He breathed the very atmosphere of threatening and slaughter, and expended it in blast after blast of hottest fury. Such a man was impervious to reason, and therefore Yahweh dealt with him as his circumstances required. In one swift blow he was flung to the ground, humbled in the very dust, shaken out of the fleshly pride that previously dominated him. His natural sight was blinded by the heavenly vision, but his spiritual vision was opened to receive the divine revelation. As far as the Gentile world is concerned, the conversion of Paul is the second greatest event in history, only superseded in importance by the influence of the death and resurrection of the Lord. When we read Acts 9, therefore, we read of a turning point in world history; for whether it is considered in relation to the proclamation of the Truth or the development of the Apostasy that arose from a perversion of Paul's preaching, the world was never the same again after the baptism of Saul whose name was changed to Paul.

THE BLINDING LIGHT ON THE ROAD TO DAMASCUS (Acts 9)

Saul The Inquisitor

The young Pharisee, Saul, breathed in the atmosphere of hate against the followers of Christ that had been generated by Jewish opposition.* His fellow Pharisees, together with their Sadducee associates in the Sanhedrin and priesthood, could talk of little else than

the need to ruthlessly crush the hated sect.

The early success that attended the great persecution against the rapidly growing Ecclesia in Jerusalem, only served to fan the fires of that hatred. The advice of Gamaliel, at whose feet Saul had learned the law, was forgotten or

* There is no comparable word in the Greek for the word "out" in Acts 9:1, which reads that Saul "breathed threatenings and slaughter." This constituted the very atmosphere in which he lived, so that figuratively he breathed in the air of hate.

ignored, and with grim determination the Jewish leaders set about to completely destroy the Ecclesia.

Saul was foremost in the persecution. He was seized with an insane fury against the followers of Christ (Acts 26:11), and moved against them with dynamic energy and ruthless savagery. The brethren learned that they could expect no mercy from Saul, for at his instigation, both men and women were dragged into prison and given over to death, though their only crime was their determination to worship Yahweh according to a conscience governed by the word which they believed and loved (Acts 22:4).

Saul's violent persecution caused the Jerusalem Ecclesia to disintegrate, scattering its members into all parts as they sought a refuge from the storm (Acts 8:3).

But even the shelter of foreign lands did not save them. Wherever the government was favourable to the high priest in Jerusalem, Saul received permission to act against adherents of the new sect, and in his mad fury he persecuted them even to foreign cities (Acts 26:11).

He was determined to utterly exterminate Christianity, and he became notorious for his fanaticism. But he miscalculated the power of the Movement. Whereas prosperity is often fatal to true Christianity, it thrives on persecution. "They that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word." Saul found his work multiplied. Instead of being localised in Jerusalem, the new sect began to take on the character of a world-wide movement. In Jerusalem, the leaders urged him on to greater efforts of

persecution and violence.

Thus his hatred and fury were recharged as he breathed in the atmosphere of threatenings and slaughter that dominated the so-called City of Peace.

Authority From The High Priest

Having heard that Damascus, the capital of Syria, was one of the places where the fugitives had taken refuge, and that they were carrying on their propaganda among the numerous Jews of that city, Saul went to the high priest, who exercised spiritual jurisdiction over Jews everywhere, to secure letters of authority and commission (Acts 26:12), empowering him to seize, bind and bring to Jerusalem all of the new way of thinking whom he might find there.

But would the government of Damascus permit such action to be taken? Yes, there had been a recent change in rulership. Aretas was now king (2 Cor. 11:32), and he was sympathetic to Jewish interests. He was father-in-law to Herod Antipas, who divorced the daughter of Aretas, and took instead the wife of his brother Philip. This insult resulted in war. Herod was defeated by Aretas, and appealed to the Emperor Tiberius who sent Vitellius to punish Aretas. Whilst Vitellius was on the march, however, news was received of the death of Tiberius (A.D.37). Caligula, the next Emperor, was opposed to Herod, and probably assigned Damascus to Aretas, whilst Vitellius was ordered to withdraw.

As Herod was hated of the Jews of Jerusalem, there was naturally a sympathy shown by them towards Aretas, and this was re-

reciprocated. It seemed to Saul that the way had been opened for what he believed to be a work of God.

The year was approximately A.D.37, and Theophilus had been appointed as high priest. This very important date, therefore, determines the period of Saul's conversion, and provides a key to the chronology of the Acts.

The Cavalcade Sets Out

With a guard of soldiers, Saul set out from Jerusalem for Damascus, a journey of about one hundred and sixty miles. With the slow means of travel then used, and stops on the way, this would probably occupy a period of about six days.

It was a tiring journey, but Saul considered the mission an important one. There was a considerable Jewish population in the city (Josephus records that as many as 10,000 were slain in a massacre in Nero's time), and therefore as many as forty synagogues.

The little cavalcade, on its inquisitional mission, moved steadily towards the north, probably taking the Roman route that led through Capernaum, moving up the Golan heights towards the highlands overlooking Damascus.

The Blinding Light and Startling Voice

It was about noon (Acts 22:6), and the bright eastern sun shone down at its brightest and hottest. But the city of Damascus was near at hand, and encouraged by the sight, the little cavalcade moved steadily on, instead of stopping and taking a rest.

But suddenly, without warning,

it was brought to a halt by a very strange phenomenon which filled them all with awe and fear.

They saw a light in the heavens, greater than the light of the sun. It moved swiftly towards them, finally encompassing them with flashes of light,* so dazzling in brightness as to eclipse the midday sun itself (Acts 26:13).

Full of fear, unable to blot out the terrible light by their hands, they fell to the ground, trying to hide their faces from the piercing rays of light that struck at them (Acts 26:14).

And then they heard the Voice!

Only Saul understood the words, though the others all heard the sound. To his amazement, Saul, in his prostrate position, heard the Voice from out of the centre of light, speaking to him in Hebrew, appealing to him:

"Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the pricks!"

The reference, of course, is to the goads, a long pole sharpened at the end, by which drovers used to urge along unwilling oxen. A particularly stubborn beast might kick at the goad, only to harm its legs as well as its body, and, in any case, being forced along a course that it wanted to avoid.

Saul listened to the appeal in amazement, afraid to lift his eyes to the terrible light. From his recumbent position, forcibly paying homage to the one he hated, he tremblingly asked:

"Who are you, Lord?"

Again the Voice spoke:

"I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you

* The words "shined round about him" (Acts 9:3) are a translation of the Greek "*periastrapto*" signifying "to flash around." See Diaglott.

persecute. It is hard for you to kick against the pricks!"

The answer caused great consternation to Saul. "Jesus of Nazareth"!! Surely the Voice is wrong! Jesus had been put to death! What then of the Voice? Can dead men speak? Of course not! Then had he made a terrible mistake? Was Stephen right after all? What of the advice of his teacher, Gamaliel, who had warned against persecuting the new sect, lest he be found in opposition to God? Had his cursed Pharisaic stubbornness blinded him to the truth of the matter? There was no disputing the Voice! It came from a living person! Jesus must have been brought from the dead! The followers of the hated sect were right and he was wrong! There was no doubt about that! But was it possible for the Messiah to die as a criminal on a stake? On this matter, Saul needed further instruction, but one fact now was apparent to him: Jesus lived, and he was wrong. He must submit to the one whose Voice he had heard. But what of those he had put to death? What of the congregations he had scattered? It did not bear thinking about, and had to be put to one side for the moment.

Saul lifted his eyes to the light, and though blinded by its brilliance to all other subjects, he very clearly saw the person of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8). Perhaps he saw the scars on his hands; perhaps he had seen him in the Temple prior to his crucifixion. In any case, he recognised the Lord, and this swept aside any lingering doubts that he must have had. Jesus lived; there was no doubt about that, and he must sub-

mit. Courageously, characteristically, Saul replied:

"What shall I do Lord?"

The Lord Jesus replied:

"Get up and continue your journey to Damascus; there you will be told of all the tasks that you must do. For I have appeared unto you for this purpose, to make you a minister (an under-rower, one who accepts directions from another without necessarily knowing the course taken. Gr. "huperetes") and a witness both of these things which you have seen, and of those things in which I will appear unto you. Delivering you from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send you, to open their eyes (significant for the blinded Saul), and turning them from darkness to light, from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me." (See Acts 26:16-18).

Meanwhile, the men with Paul had remained transfixed and speechless. They had heard the sound of the voice, but could not discern the significance of the words spoken. Unlike Saul, they did not see the Lord.

Exceedingly troubled, Saul lifted himself from the ground, but could see nothing. The brightness had completely blinded him. Figuratively, it represented his spiritual condition, and he realised it. He needed help and guidance, so taking him by the hand, his attendants led him into Damascus.

Three Days Of Darkness

Damascus was a large and well designed city. Its main artery was a street called Straight, which was then a wide and splendid road one hundred feet wide, with colonades separating the two footways on the side from the central road, and adorned with a triumphal arch. In a house, in that street, there lived

a Jew called Judas, with whom Saul had arranged to stay. Judas had made preparations for his visitor, and doubtless felt honored at entertaining such a well-known official and religionist. He knew of the energy and dedication of this Pharisee of the Pharisees, and perhaps was a little overawed at the occasion.

What a surprise for Judas, when the guard led to the door of his home a humble, blinded man who refused to eat any food placed before him, or enter into any conversation concerning his mission in the city.

Judas clearly saw that this mighty Pharisee had been humbled by some outstanding experience on the road to Darnascus.

The blinded Saul remained in the house for three days, refusing both food and drink.

How did he use that time?

He knew the Old Testament Scriptures intimately. His education in Judaism had required that he learn large sections of them by heart, so that he could quote from memory. Moreover, his mind would take in all that he knew of the teaching of the Apostles, the defence of Stephen, perhaps some of the teaching of the Lord that he may have heard in the Temple or elsewhere before the crucifixion. He would recall such passages as Genesis 3:15; Genesis 22; Psalm 22; Isaiah 53.

The fact that Jesus now lived provided the key to Scriptures he had not understood before. The scales fell from his spiritual vision, as he gathered all the evidence before his mind, and recast his understanding of the Word.

How blind he had been! How destitute of a true understanding! What a criminal he had revealed himself to have been in murdering people who believed the truth!

The blinded Saul, encased in the blackness of his own mind, was a pathetic figure in the home of Judas, as he lamented his past actions, and saw the full extent of his criminality. He realised that for all his high pretensions as a Pharisee he was nothing but "a blasphemer, a persecutor, a violent man," blundering in the blind ignorance of his unbelief (1 Tim. 1:13).

How blind he had been, even though, in his egotism, he had imagined that he was blameless (Phil. 3:6).

He realised now that he had been completely devoid of spiritual life; he could only liken his previous state to a spiritual miscarriage.*

What could he now do to retrieve the situation, but to pray earnestly unto Yahweh that He might forgive him for all the evil he had done, and that in some humble way he might be able to

* In 1 Corinthians 15:8, Paul describes himself as then being "one born out of due time." This is usually interpreted as signifying as being born before the proper time, but as Paul came after the other apostles this obviously was not his meaning. The Greek word "*ektroma*" signifies an abortion, a miscarriage, that is a dead foetus. That was Paul's opinion of his spiritual condition prior to his conversion: a dead foetus absolutely void of life, a vile thing fit only to be buried out of sight and forgotten. The greatest miracle, he declared (see vv.8-10), was that God should grant spiritual life to such a one as that!

make restitution for his great sin of ignorance and commission.

And in the abounding mercy of his loving heavenly Father, he received answer to his prayer. His sightless eyes received a vision of a man named Ananias entering

the house of Judas, and placing his hands upon him that he might receive his sight. He recognised this as a message from heaven, and full of gratitude he poured out his thanks unto God (Acts 9:11-12).

ANANIAS IS SENT ON A MISSION OF MERCY

(Acts 9:10-16)

Saul Is Baptised

Among the most prominent of the disciples of the Lord in Damascus, was a man by name of Ananias. His name means *Yahweh has been Gracious or has Protected*, and truly he sheltered in the gracious protection of God. He not only followed the Lord Jesus, but also continued to carefully observe the principles of the Law, so that he was held in good report among all the Jews who dwelt there (Acts 22:12).

He kept the Law, of course, in the light of the revelation that had come from the realisation that the Lord Jesus was the antitype of all its types, shadows and sacrifices, and therefore free of the formalised Judaism of the times, which robbed it of its true meaning.

Ananias had evidently assumed the oversight of the local Ecclesia, and therefore kept careful note of all developments that might affect it. He knew of the outbreak of persecution in Jerusalem, and of the violent attacks of Saul against the Ecclesia in that city. He had been advised of Saul's intention to visit Damascus and initiate a local persecution, and with the other disciples of that city, he was in trepidation as to the outcome.

Doubtless the prayers of the local Ecclesia had ascended to heaven, beseeching the help of

Yahweh in view of these developments, as had those of Saul the previous persecutor! Both sought the intervention of God, and both prayers were answered.

In a divine visitation, the Lord appeared unto Ananias, and spoke to him:

"Ananias!" he called.

"Here am I Lord," came the answer.

The Lord instructed him:

"Arise, and go into the street called Straight and inquire at the home of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus; for he is there praying, and he has seen a man named Ananias entering and laying hands on him so that he may see."

Ananias was staggered at the mission. Go and seek Saul of Tarsus! Saul the notorious persecutor, concerning whom they had been praying! Saul who had imprisoned some of his brethren, and murdered others!

There must be some mistake.

"Lord," protested Ananias, "I have heard from many about this man, how much he has hurt your saints in Jerusalem, and here he has authority from the chief priests to put into chains every one who calls upon your name."

The reassuring voice of the Lord came to Ananias again:

"Go! For he is my chosen instrument to carry my name before Gentiles and kings and the people of Israel. For I will show him how much he will have to suffer on behalf of my name."

With these amazing instructions ringing in his ears, the devout and faithful Ananias made his thoughtful way to the broad boulevard called Straight, and to the house of Judas, where he enquired for Saul.

He was shown into a room, and saw before him the great persecutor of the Ecclesias. He was seated in a chair, completely absorbed, impervious to all about him, and showing clear evidence of having suffered a terrible shock.

He looked a pathetic picture, thoroughly humbled, with "bodily presence weak and contemptible."

In spite of his earlier foreboding, Ananias was moved with compassion for the one before him, especially as he recalled the words of the Lord. Spontaneously approaching him, and placing his hands upon him that he might receive his sight, he called upon Saul to be baptised:

"Brother Saul," he said, "the Lord sent me, even Jesus who appeared to you on the road you travelled, in order that you may recover sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

Instantly, as if scales fell from the eyes of Saul, his sight was restored, and he looked into the countenance of his friend and brother; a man who, a few days earlier, he would have roughly bound, and led to prison and to death.

Again Ananias spoke to him:

"The God of our fathers has chosen you to know His will, to see the Just One and to hear a message from his own lips; for you will be his witness unto everyone concerning what you have seen and heard. Now then, why hesitate? Rise; be baptised, and calling on his name, be cleansed of your sins" (Acts 22:14-16).

Although Saul was weak through the shock he had received, and the lack of nourishment for over three days, he immediately arose, and was first baptised. Then, after eating something, he regained his strength.

Thus illuminated in the truth, baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus, and now possessing the Holy Spirit, Saul was eager to channel his zeal and talents into the work of the Truth, to make restitution for all the harm he had done previously.



The First Preaching of Saul

(Acts 9:20-22)

Those Jews of Damascus who had bitterly opposed the Ecclesia had awaited the coming of Saul that they might assist him to crush the hated sect. There was a need, therefore, for Saul to explain why he was not prepared to proceed with the planned persecution. This took him to the very synagogues where he had intended to initiate it, but now it was to preach Jesus unto the Jews!

Preaching Christ in the Synagogues

Shortly afterwards, Saul left the house of Judas, and abode with the disciples in Damascus. He remained with them several days, doubtless studying the Scriptures with them in the light of the revelation made to him. His familiarity with the Word now stood him in great stead, for it enabled him to instantly grasp those Scriptures that related to the Lord, and to see how completely his death and resurrection fulfilled the requirements set forth therein.

It was soon apparent to the disciples that Saul the persecutor would be an outstanding expositor: and concrete evidence of this was soon made manifest to the Jews as well.

At the appropriate time, Saul made his way to the synagogues where he had intended previously to bring pressure on those Jews who accepted the new teaching. There was a need for him to now explain why this had been cancelled. To their astonishment, the Jews heard this previously hard and bitter Pharisee expound unto them that Jesus is the son of God.

He supported this by appeals to the Old Testament Scriptures, with such power that none were capable of resisting his words.

The Jews were astounded at the change:

"Is not this he that made havoc of those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and came here to take them as prisoners shackled to the chief priests?" they remarked.

Some raised objections, but he easily answered them. And as Saul felt the power of the Word in debate, he gained greater confidence in his new beliefs, and confronted the Jews at Damascus, proving that Jesus is the Christ.

His adversaries could not match the force of his arguments, nor the skill by which they were presented.

He Visits Arabia For Further Instruction

(Galatians 1:16-17)

Saul was moved by an irresistible urge to preach; in addition, he had been told that he must bear the message of Salvation to all men, both Jew and Gentile. His brush with the Jews in the synagogues of Damascus had revealed to him how powerfully the Word endorsed the Messiahship of Jesus, but to preach those things to Gentiles, to broaden the hope to include those who once were excluded unless they became proselytes, was a complete departure from previous practise.

Saul needed further instruction before he would be equipped for that work.

He felt the need for protracted

isolation, that he might think the whole matter out, and by communion with Yahweh find guidance in the Word to fortify him in his labours.

For that purpose, he left Damascus, and travelled far to the south to Arabia (Galatians 1:17). It is not specifically stated as to what part of Arabia he went to, but Sinai is associated with Arabia in the same Epistle (Gal. 4:25), and he most likely travelled to that mount.

And what more significant spot could he have selected to find the help he needed at that time? This is a place that Yahweh has seemingly reserved for purposes of specific revelation. It is a mountainous region of harsh, red granite, surrounded by arid desert. Mount Sinai itself rises some 7,500 feet on a plateau. It is surrounded by deep valleys and a large plain, out of which it stands like a huge, rough altar. There Moses received his revelation from Yahweh; there the children of Israel were taken that they might be brought into covenant relationship with God; there Elijah fled to receive the grand revelation which sent him back to Israel with renewed vigour.

Now the man who had been selected above all others to carry the message of salvation to Gentiles was drawn by inexorable need to make his way to this sacred spot to commune with the Father and Son.

How long he was there, and what instruction he received, is not revealed. Three years after his conversion, Saul again visited Jerusalem (Gal. 1:18), so he could have been in the vicinity for some time. Between the two visits he

travelled down to Arabia and back again to Damascus, by-passing Jerusalem. He returned even more strongly fortified in his understanding of the divine purpose. He now saw a wonderful vista of truth opened out before him that previously had not been so clearly revealed. It was:

"The revelation of the secret (i.e., that Gentiles should share the Gospel with Jews) which was kept hidden in previous ages, but had now been made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, about to be made known to all nations for the obedience of the faith" (Rom. 16:26).

"The dispensation of the grace of God which Christ by revelation made known unto Saul, even the secret, which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel" (Eph. 3:2-5).

These statements, made later by the Apostle, clearly show that he was given a revelation (quite apart from that referred to in 2 Corinthians 12:1-3, which was given later) which greatly illuminated him in the requirements of God as far as preaching to the Gentiles was concerned. It made a tremendous impression upon Saul, so that he became even more entrenched in the convictions that the blinding light on the way to Damascus had revealed to him.

Saul Returns to Damascus (Galatians 1:17)

Saul returned to Damascus, a journey of over 300 miles from Mt. Sinai, probably journeying along the Kings' Highway east of the river Jordan. He would thus by-pass Jerusalem and Judea, doubtless desiring to do so at this time that he might thoughtfully

ponder the revelations given him, and even more firmly confirm to himself his understanding of Scripture.

The darkness of his mind was now illuminated by the blinding light of divine truth that clearly revealed the fulness of the divine purpose.

Back in Damascus he again met with the brethren, and they received further evidence of the vast change that had overtaken this one-time persecutor of the Ecclesia. He now was able to discourse freely and warmly of the truth in Christ Jesus, and by his superb understanding of the Old Testament Scripture, fortify the brethren in Damascus in those things they believed.

The Jews Plot to Kill Saul
(Acts 9:23-25; 2 Cor. 11:32-33)

Once again Saul visited the synagogues of Damascus. But now there was added force given to his preaching because of the revelations he had received. The Jews were not able to successfully refute his arguments, and when defeated by the force of Scripture, and urged to accept Jesus as Messiah as the only way of hope, they became more and more irritated, and hardened against him.

Saul, on his part, became the more emboldened as he felt the power of Scripture, and urged the truth concerning Jesus Christ with greater vehemence. He was full of confidence in his beliefs, and felt a desire to move others with them.

But he was not yet ready for the work before him, and in the purpose of God, had to be humbled further.

The Jews became more and

more impatient with him. Perhaps urged on by those of Jerusalem to whom Saul would have communicated his change of heart, they took counsel to kill him. Saul learned of their plots, and decided that the time had come for him to leave Damascus, and to report to the Apostles at Jerusalem. After all, he was well known to them because of his prominence at the trial of Stephen and the subsequent vigor by which he had conducted the persecution of the Ecclesia.

Finally, the opposition of the Jews of Damascus became so violent, that Saul found the need to hide from their anger. Perhaps it was in Damascus that he was scourged by the Jews in their synagogues, as reported in 2 Corinthians 11:24. Be that as it may, the persecutor had become the persecuted. Pressure had been brought to bear upon the governor of the city under Aretas the king who was favourable to the Jews of Jerusalem, to arrest Saul, so that now he went in danger of his life.

The Jews were determined that he should not escape them. They heard of his plans to leave Damascus for Jerusalem, and arranged that the gates of the city should be watched day and night. Soldiers were posted there for that purpose (2 Cor. 11:32). It was a most humiliating experience for Saul. He who had been honoured by Jews everywhere, who had prided himself upon being a "Pharisee of the Pharisees," and a man before whom others deferred (Gal. 1:14), now had to hide like a hunted criminal. He could neither go among the people of

Damascus freely, nor openly walk through the gates of the city in order to leave it. He personally experienced the feelings of those whom he had previously hunted and persecuted.

Some form of escape was necessary, and one ultimately was suggested. Some of the houses in Damascus were built close to the wall, and in some cases right on it, with windows let into the wall

itself. The disciples of Damascus had access to one such house, and saw in this an excellent opportunity to effect an escape.

One night it was accomplished. Saul was lowered down the side of the wall in a large basket, and in the darkness, ignominiously made his escape. It was an experience he never forgot; he had never been so humiliated before (2 Cor. 11:32-33).

Saul Joins the Jerusalem Ecclesia

(Acts 9:26-29; Galatians 1:18-19)

Three years had elapsed since Saul left Jerusalem to initiate the persecution in Damascus. He left full of fiery zeal to attack those whom he believed to be enemies of the faith; he returned a completely changed man; thoroughly humbled by his experiences, and anxious to assist the Ecclesia he once attacked. But the Ecclesia had not forgotten the bitterness of his inquisition, and for a time refused to accept his conversion as genuine.

Saul and Barnabas

Saul's main desire to visit Jerusalem at this time was to get better acquainted with Peter who was the most eminent of the Apostles, and to explain the details of his astounding conversion to the brethren of that city.

He was confident that they would accept him eagerly, and he felt convinced that he would be able to reveal to his erstwhile associates how wrong they had been to persecute the followers of Jesus.

Perhaps he thought that if he could bring home to the leaders of the Jews in Jerusalem the folly of their opposition to the teaching of Jesus, he would save the nation that he loved so much (Romans

9:1-2).

But, first he had to make his peace with the Ecclesia that he had so brutally opposed originally.

He made his way to Jerusalem, and presented himself to the brethren of that city. But they refused to accept him. They were afraid of him, and refused to accept his conversion as genuine. Saul, who previously had been so proud and so haughty, so incensed in the ignorance of his own false understanding, again experienced humiliation, as he had to seek out one who would be prepared to introduce him to the Ecclesia.

He found him in the disciple called Barnabas, whose faith and affection had earlier come under

the notice of the brethren. He told Barnabas of the vision on the way to Damascus, and how, in consequence, he now realised that Jesus lives as the Christ. He also outlined to him some of his experiences in the synagogues of Damascus, where he had attempted to preach Jesus unto the Jews.

Barnabas realised that Saul spake the truth, and that, through the intervention of God, one of the most amazing conversions of all time had taken place. Eagerly embracing Saul, he introduced him to the leaders* of the Ecclesia, and explained to them how that he had seen the Lord Jesus on his way to Damascus and had spoken to him, and of the adventures that he had experienced when he had boldly proclaimed the name of Jesus in the synagogues.

The right hand of fellowship was accordingly given to Saul by the Ecclesia in Jerusalem, and he associated freely with its members during the time that he stayed in the city.

Saul in Jerusalem

Saul did not remain long in Jerusalem. His main concern was to make personal acquaintance with Peter, and he stayed with him for fifteen days. During that time he boldly and publicly proclaimed to the Jews the name of the Lord Jesus.

This led to much debating; particularly with the Hellenists in Jerusalem, called "the Grecians" (Acts 9:29) because of their endorsement of Grecian ways. Stephen was one once (Acts 6:1),

and perhaps Saul sought to especially proclaim the Truth to them in a spirit of deep compunction at the part he had played in that disciple's death.

But they hated him because of the power of his witness, and, like the Jews of Damascus, they determined that he must die as a traitor to the cause. They went about to slay him, so that he stood daily in jeopardy of his life.

The fierceness of the opposition did not deter Saul, however. He could not erase from his mind the memory of that terrible day when in fury he consented to the death of the righteous, courageous and forthright Stephen, and attempted to make retribution by pleading with Stephen's one-time companions at Jerusalem, believing that his amazing conversion would itself be sufficient to cause them to heed the message he now proclaimed.

But it was all in vain: the more he preached the greater became their opposition, and the more outspoken their determination that he must die.

The Vision in the Temple (Acts 22:17-21)

There was no disputing the facts of Saul's conversion. That one so prominent and so bitter in opposition to the followers of Jesus should so drastically change indicated strong and powerful reasons for so doing. Saul had been certain that the very evidence of his life would cause his friends to hearken to him, but it was not so. The more he preached, the

* Though Luke records that Barnabas brought Saul to the Apostles (Acts 9:27), he actually only saw Peter and James (Gal. 1:18-19), so that Peter represented all the others who must have been absent at the time.

more bitter became the opposition.

Meanwhile, like the other converted Jews, Saul saw no reason to abandon the Temple. It was still the Temple of Yahweh, and the worship there conducted was that laid down by His law. Saul, with the other believers, participated therein (see Acts 21:20), understanding, for the first time, its true significance. He saw behind its formalism, perceived the substance in Christ indicated by the shadow of types and sacrifices, and discovered a new meaning in worship whilst rejecting the evils of Judaism. He thus frequented the Temple, and regularly engaged in prayer there.

On one occasion, a few weeks after he had arrived in Jerusalem, he was in the Temple, completely absorbed in prayer, when being in a trance, he again saw the Lord Jesus, and once more received a message from him:

"Make haste, and get quickly out of Jerusalem," he was told, "because they will not receive your testimony concerning me!"

This did not make sense to Saul. Why should they not receive his testimony? Did not his very conversion indicate the truth of his witness? Who had been his equal in persecuting the Ecclesia? Surely the change wrought in such a man should demonstrate that it had not been caused by any whim of the moment!

Saul forgot that previously he had been unmoved by similar changes witnessed in the other Apostles (see Acts 4:13-14).

"Lord," he replied to Jesus, "they know well enough that I went from synagogue to synagogue, arresting and beating those who believed in you, and, when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I myself was stand-

ing by and approving, and I watched over the clothes of those who killed him!"

It seemed logical and reasonable that the Jews should now listen to such a man. But human nature is both illogical and unreasonable. Inexorably the Lord replied to Saul:

"Go, for I shall send you far away to the Gentiles!"

The command was peremptory: it had to be obeyed immediately. The tide of hate was rising so rapidly against Saul that delay could prove fatal. The brethren urged him to follow the advice of Jesus immediately and to leave both Jerusalem and Judea for Gentile lands. They brought him to Caesarea, where he took ship for Tarsus. But apparently he landed in Syria (possibly at Tyre or Sidon), and moving through the regions of Syria and Cilicia, made his way back to Tarsus.

Why he took this particular route is unknown. It could have been that the ship upon which he embarked at Caesarea was wrecked as it sailed up the coast, for in writing to the Corinthians, he mentions that he "three times suffered shipwreck" and on one occasion, he was in the water, floating on a plank for twenty-four hours (2 Cor. 11:25). None of these occasions are mentioned in the *Acts of the Apostles*, and one of them could have been on this occasion.

Due to this hurried escape from Jerusalem, he was unknown to the Ecclesias of Christ throughout Judea. Nevertheless, the rumour went from one to another, and was repeated a hundred times:

"Our former persecutor is now preaching the faith he once destroyed!"

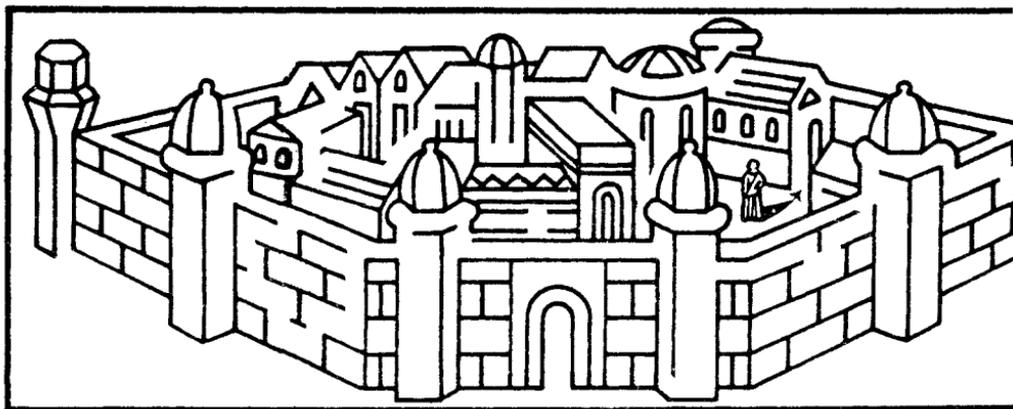
(Gal. 1:23).

Thanksgiving was offered in the Ecclesias throughout the country, praising God for the relief that had come from the bitter perse-

cution.

Meanwhile, Saul made his way to his home town of Tarsus, there to preach the precious truths that had been revealed to him.





Persecution spreads the Gospel

(Acts 11:19-30)

The bitter persecution that had been initiated by Saul helped rather than hindered the spread of the Gospel. Many believers fled Jerusalem to escape arrest, and carried the doctrine of Christ with them. It was particularly successful in Antioch, and soon a large Ecclesia was established in that city to become a centre for the proclamation of the Truth in many parts.

The Antioch Ecclesia Is Formed

The persecution initiated by Saul affected the Ecclesia in Jerusalem like a large stone thrown into a pond. The great splash in the centre forms ripples that extend out to the very extremities.

That was the case as the disciples of the Lord fled from the persecution to distant parts. Some travelled north to Phoenicia, others to the island of Cyprus, and some to far-away Antioch, the capital of Syria on the river Orontes about 300 miles north of Jerusalem.

Wherever they went, these disciples visited the synagogues and proclaimed the doctrine of salvation to the Jews only.

However, some of them who

were from Cyprus and Cyrene, and being Hellenist Jews, were more liberal in their outlook.

When they arrived in the city of Antioch, they did not observe this exclusiveness and introduced it to the notice of Gentiles.

Antioch was a busy metropolis with a population of about 500,000 people. The preaching of these Hellenist Jews to the Grecians of that city was marked by outstanding success, for many believed and turned unto the Lord.

Barnabas Sent to Supervise the Work (vv.22-24)

A report of these doings was sent to the Ecclesia in Jerusalem. Perhaps this was done by the Judaisers as a warning, for they

would have viewed these proceedings with doubt, as providing further evidence of liberality on the part of certain ones in the Ecclesia, and in order to urge that some restrictive measures should be taken.

Accordingly, it was proposed to send somebody to travel through those parts where Ecclesias had sprung up, that the work might be properly supervised, and, if necessary, further assistance be supplied from Jerusalem. Choice fell upon Barnabas, who was a native of Cyprus (Acts 4:36), and he was instructed to visit Ecclesias in foreign parts as far north as Antioch.

Barnabas was an admirable choice for the work. He was a warm-hearted brother of fearless courage. He had shown his liberality towards the poor in Jerusalem (Acts 4:36), and his fearlessness in introducing Saul to the Ecclesia (Acts 9:27). Now he took with him a message of great encouragement, demonstrating by his own zeal and dedication what was expected of the new converts.

In most of the centres, the Truth had been proclaimed to Jews only, and in those parts Barnabas encountered no problem. But in Antioch it was different. There the Truth had been preached to Gentiles as well, and many had accepted it. Barnabas, fresh from the discussions in Jerusalem, where he had heard Peter defending his action in baptising Cornelius, realised that the purpose of Yahweh required that the word of salvation should be preached to the Gentiles, and therefore rejoiced when he saw the grace of God in Antioch manifested in the number that had accepted it.

He gave the ecclesial exhortation, calling upon the brethren to "cleave unto the Lord" with "purpose of heart" (Acts 11:23). He warned them that they could not just drift into the Kingdom of God. They needed a policy, and should set themselves the objective of obtaining the Kingdom (see Deut. 32:46-47; Phil. 3:13; 1 Tim. 4:15). By such means they would be strengthened to "cleave unto the Lord." The word in the Greek is *prosmeno* and signifies "to abide with." If they lived with a purpose, with an objective in view, they would more likely continue to abide with the Lord, and not drift back into the world from whence they came.

The example of Barnabas gave point to his exhortation. He was good in character, strong in faith, and vigorous in the word. Full of the Holy Spirit, he gave himself to the preaching of the truth, and as a result "much people were added unto the Lord."

Barnabas Seeks the Help of Saul (Acts 11:25-26)

Barnabas could see that Antioch provided a most fruitful centre for the preaching of the Word, and sought for some assistance in its proclamation. He recalled the vigor of Saul, and remembered that he had left Jerusalem for Tarsus. Tarsus was not far from Antioch, and Barnabas decided to move on to that city to seek Saul and recruit him for the work at Antioch.

So once again the two disciples met. On the previous occasion Barnabas had introduced Saul to the Ecclesia; now he invited him to co-operate in the work at Antioch. On his part, Saul was

ready, for he had been waiting for such a call. He left Tarsus in company with Barnabas and came to Antioch where, with characteristic zeal, he threw himself into the work. There the two friends remained an entire year, assembling with the Ecclesia and teaching the people.

Soon a large ecclesia was established there. It became known throughout Antioch as the Ecclesia of the Christ. The disciples were called Christians, or followers of Christ, first in Antioch.

It was natural for Gentiles to call the disciples Christians, because they proclaimed that Jesus is the Christ; but as the Jews rejected this doctrine as blasphemy, they would not associate the disciples of the Lord with their Messiah.

**Famine Predicted: Help Sent by Saul and Barnabas
vv. 27-30**

Among the gifts of the Spirit was that of prophesying. This related both to the forth-telling of the things of God as well as foretelling future events.

The main work of such prophets, however, was to instruct unto edification and comfort (1 Cor. 14:3); but when moved so to do, they also predicted things to come.

Some disciples, possessing the spirit-gift of prophecy, made their way from Jerusalem to Antioch, primarily to instruct the members of the newly formed Ecclesia in the deeper things of God. One of

these prophets, whose name was Agabus, stood up in the meeting and predicted by the Holy Spirit that there would be a great famine throughout the world. It was obvious that if this happened, the believers of Judea would be more greatly affected than those of other parts, for the other Jews would take the opportunity of oppressing them by denying them food.

This was an opportunity for the Gentile believers to show their love and consideration for their Jewish brethren. They determined to take up a collection to support their brethren in Judea, and they called upon Barnabas and Saul to convey it to Jerusalem.

The famine came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar. His reign is noted for several famines. Josephus (Ant. Jews 3:15:3; 20:2:5; 20:5:2) indicates that the one commencing in A.D.44 was particularly severe as far as Judea was concerned. His statement is confirmed by Eusebius. Thus the prophecy of Agabus was fulfilled shortly after his visit to Antioch. His name means locust, an insect that is noted in Israel for famine and trouble. The Acts of the Apostles records two prophecies by Agabus, and both of them predicted trouble (see Acts 21:10)!

Thus once again Saul found himself back in the city of Jerusalem, this time on an errand of mercy calculated to bind the Gentile and Jewish Ecclesias more closely together.

Saul : The Instrument Commissioned

(Acts 12:25 - 13:3)

Having been thoroughly prepared for the work, the time arrived, in the purpose of Yahweh, for Saul to be specifically chosen and commissioned with the task of preaching the Truth to Gentiles. It is important to recognise the thoroughness of this preparation. Saul was not sent out before he was ready, and some eight years elapsed between his conversion and his commission. During that time his knowledge of the Word grew, equipping him to become an efficient preacher for Christ. As the Apostle now looked back over his life, he was able to perceive throughout a divine providence guiding his development to this end from early childhood. His strict Jewish upbringing, his freeborn status as a Roman citizen, his education in Greek learning, and above all else, the special tuition and wonderful revelations that he received from God through the Lord Jesus, and which provided him with an understanding of the divine purpose second to none (2 Cor. 12:1-4), all helped to equip him to become an ambassador of Christ to both Jew and Gentile. Thus he wrote to the Galatians: "God separated me from birth, and called me by His grace, to reveal His son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen" (Gal. 1:16). That time had now arrived.

The Return To Antioch

Having completed their errand of mercy in Jerusalem (see p.92), Barnabas and Saul returned to Antioch, taking John Mark with them. Mark was cousin to Barnabas (Col. 4:10), and his keen enthusiasm for the Truth gave promise of excellent help in its proclamation.

Mary, the mother of Mark, was sister to Barnabas (Col. 4:10), so that it is most likely that Barnabas and Saul would have stayed with her during their time in Jerusalem. If so, they would have had personal experience of the drama that took place, when the brethren met in that home to pray for Peter (Acts 12:12), and were surprised at his amazing release. They, therefore, would be able to provide the Ecclesia in Antioch with first hand evidence of the extent of the persecution conducted by Herod.

Back in Antioch they doubtless

reported these circumstances to the Ecclesia, and this led to a remarkable meeting being convened in which Barnabas and Saul were appointed to a special preaching mission.

The Commission

The Truth was flourishing in Antioch. It was proclaimed with power, so that the Ecclesia steadily grew. This stemmed from good leadership, careful instruction and aftercare given to the new converts.

The Ecclesia was noted for the quality of the prophets and teachers who ministered to it.

Foremost among them was Barnabas. Because of his age, experience and knowledge, he took the lead in Antioch. But there were also Simeon who was surnamed Niger, or Black, possibly because he was a Jew who originated from Africa; Lucius of Cyrene who was thus associated with

an influential group of Jews from that country who had a special synagogue erected for their worship in Jerusalem (Acts 6:9); Manaen, who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and therefore occupied a position of affluence and influence; and, listed last of all, Saul.

These met together for a very solemn purpose which, though not specifically mentioned, is certainly implied. The persecution in Jerusalem presented a crisis to the Truth. It was obvious that if this continued, and the Apostles were scattered (and Peter already had fled the city), the initiative in preaching would have to be taken over by another Ecclesia. The brethren therefore desired guidance as to what should be done under the circumstances. This is suggested in view of the subsequent instruction of the Holy Spirit which must have been in accordance with the spirit and purpose of the gathering.

They had given themselves to earnest prayer and worship, when suddenly it was interrupted by the Holy Spirit making known the divine will. They were instructed:

"Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them."

This was the call for which Saul had been waiting. His appointment to the work had been announced before: both to the Apostle himself and to Ananias in Damascus (Acts 9:15), as well as on the occasion in the Temple in Jerusalem when Christ had appeared to him, urging him to flee the city (Acts 22:17-21). Now the time had come to specifically send him

forth.

To go forth and preach the Gospel openly to Gentiles was a departure from the practise hitherto followed, and it needed the authority of the Holy Spirit to still any opposition or criticism. True, the prophets had predicted that the Truth would be proclaimed to Gentiles, as Paul later taught the Ecclesia in Rome (see Rom. 9:22-33), but until this direction came, Yahweh's intention had not been fully known. But now the once hidden secret was revealed, as Paul explained later:

"Now to Him that is of power to establish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery (Gr. secret) which was kept secret since the (Jewish) world began, but now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith" (Rom. 16:25-26).

Again:

"By revelation God made known unto me the mystery (secret) . . . which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel" (Eph. 3:2-6).

This revelation had been given to Paul either at the time of this gathering of prophets and teachers at Antioch to enquire of Yahweh concerning their future labours, or on an earlier occasion. In any case, it had been revealed, and Saul was ready to carry forth the message of salvation to the Gentiles.

Paul: The Instrument Used

Commissioned by God to proclaim the Gospel unto Gentiles (see Gal. 1:1; 1 Tim. 1:1; Tit. 1:3), Barnabas and Saul chose John Mark to assist them, and planned what is usually described as the First Missionary Journey. They agreed to first visit Cyprus, the birthplace of Barnabas, and then take the Gospel through the area of Asia. This would bring them into a region of considerable danger, where it was common for robbers to lurk ready to pounce on any unwary travellers. It was on this journey that Saul received the name of Paul, which he thence afterwards preferred; and that a weakness in Mark's character was revealed, which he afterwards corrected.

At Seleucia

Having received the blessing of the Ecclesia in Antioch upon the work before them, Barnabas and Saul left the busy city for the seaport of Seleucia, on the shore of the Mediterranean, some sixteen miles distant.

Barnabas, being older and more experienced in the Truth than Saul, naturally took the lead at this time, and Mark, his cousin, went with them as their assistant.

It was about the year 46, and the journey before them was to

involve a period of about two years. Saul was about thirty-nine years of age, when they left Antioch.

They planned first to visit the island of Cyprus. It was natural, for two reasons, that Barnabas should have a desire to preach the Truth there: firstly, it was his native land (Acts 4:36), and secondly, reports had been received that there would be a receptive ear for the Gospel on the part of some (Acts 11:19-20).

At Seleucia, therefore, they took ship to the island of Cyprus.

PREACHING IN CYPRUS

(Acts 13:5-12)

To Cyprus

The ship conveyed the three missionaries to the south-west coast of the island of Cyprus, and into the Bay of Salamis. As it anchored in the bay, they saw before them a flourishing commercial city, situated on a rich, well-watered plain, encircled by hills.

The scene must have stirred the emotions of Barnabas. He was so keenly interested in preaching the Gospel there that later, after he separated from Paul, he returned to the island to continue the work begun (Acts 15:39). To him it was like a home-coming.

In The Synagogues In Salamis

Salamis had a considerable Jewish population, so that the missionaries found more than one synagogue established there (Acts 13:5). As their commission was to preach first to the Jews and afterwards to the Gentiles (Rom. 1:16) they presented themselves to the Jewish communities in these synagogues, and preached the Gospel message in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Apparently their preaching was accepted passively. At all events, Luke does not record any opposition. Nor does he state whether

great success attended those efforts. Perhaps his lack of comment indicates apathy on the part of the hearers. Opposition is not always a bad thing in the preaching of the Word. It indicates that those to whom it is proclaimed are interested enough to oppose it. To feel deeply about what one believes, is a first essential to accepting the Truth. Paul would recognise that; for he who had been so bitter in his persecution, was now most ardent in his preaching.

Elymas Rebuked: Sergius Paulus Converted

From Salamis, they made their way over the island to Paphos, the capital of Cyprus, a distance of over ninety miles. As they did so, they preached in all the places where synagogues were to be found. Again, the mere fact is recorded by Luke the narrator, and no details are supplied.

However, if the campaign of the missionaries had been devoid of excitement in Salamis and the other places visited en route to Paphos, it was not the case in the capital. There they came face to face with a notorious Jew by name of Bar-Jesus. He had renounced Judaism in favour of Persian magic, and had become noted for his supposedly profound knowledge.

Bar-Jesus had ingratiated himself into the good favour of the Roman proconsul, Sergius Paulus, so that he exercised considerable influence upon him. So much so that Bar-Jesus was now domiciled in the home of the deputy, and was held in the highest esteem, by him. Sergius Paulus was a highly-intelligent man who desired truth above all else; and believed he had discovered it in the *theories* of

Elymas.

Elymas means sorcerer or magician. He was skilled in the knowledge of the heavenly bodies, and by observation of their movements, attempted to prognosticate future events. He thus represented the scientific trend of the day, and had rejected the Scriptures in favour of it.

His theories, therefore, were completely opposed to the teaching of the Gospel.

Meanwhile, Barnabas and Saul had followed the custom that they adopted elsewhere, and had attended the synagogue in Paphos to proclaim the Gospel. The forthright message they presented, the enthusiastic earnestness by which it was proclaimed no doubt became the subject of widespread comment, so that it came to the notice of the proconsul. The same feelings which had induced him to invite the Jewish sorcerer to domicile in his residence to set forth his teaching, also moved him to send for the new teachers that he might hear what they had to say, and perhaps, test it against the theories of Elymas.

Barnabas and Saul accepted the invitation, and immediately encountered the hostile antagonism of Elymas: for now he found himself opposed by men who were more than his match in the Old Testament Scriptures, and were able to detect the weakness of his reasoning.

As he listened to Barnabas and Saul and discerned the interest manifested by Sergius Paulus, Elymas feared that he might lose his influence with the proconsul. He was not prepared to do that without a struggle. He therefore interrupted the two preachers, engaging

them in open controversy, and sparing neither argument nor insult to ridicule the new teaching. So blatant and blasphemous was his attack, that it aroused the fiery indignation of Saul. Turning from the proconsul, and fixing a steady gaze upon the apostate Jew, Saul addressed him with words of justifiable rebuke:

"You son of calumny (devil), you enemy of all good, will you never stop perverting the right paths of the Lord?"

The bold attack silenced the sorcerer. He was taken aback by the forthright rebuke of the Apostle, and showed his discomfiture on his face. As for Saul, he could feel the power of the Holy Spirit upon him, and continued:

"Now, behold, the Lord's hand is upon you, and you shall be blind, unable for a time to see the sun!"

The eyes of the audience in the proconsul's palace turned on Elymas, and saw in the horror manifested in his face, and in the confused actions that he suddenly made, the terrible effects of Saul's indictment. A mist swam before the eyes of the sorcerer, which gradually intensified until total darkness overcame him. He could not see, and groping with outstretched hands, he sought for someone to lead him.

The miracle made a deep impression upon all present, and none the less upon Saul himself. Doubtless he recalled his own experience when on the way to Damascus, he, likewise, was encased in darkness, and had to seek somebody to lead him by the hand. The three days' darkness that he had had inflicted upon him, had given him opportunity to seek the light of truth; and the same privil-

ege was now afforded Elymas. The physical darkness that now took possession of this apostate Jew was indicative of his spiritual state; and with his eyes now closed to the natural bodies of heaven which previously formed the basis of his science, he was able to meditate upon the teaching of the Creator which he had neglected.

Whether it made any such impression upon Elymas, we do not know; but the proconsul was deeply moved by all that he had heard and seen. He was astonished at the power of the Apostle's teaching, and believed.

Saul Called Paul

In recording the incident of the conversion of the proconsul of Paphos, Luke, for the first time, gives the Apostle the name by which he is more commonly known: Paul (Acts 13:9). It is significant that this is in association with his namesake Sergius Paulus, and in conflict with the arrogant Elymas (*wise*) who represented the scientific teaching of the age. Let us consider the circumstances.

Paulus, the Roman, was a man of understanding and of sufficient humility to call for Barnabas and Saul with a desire to hear them.

Elymas, who unfairly withstood them, was smitten with blindness for a season, so that he had to be led about by the hand. He had claimed to be wise, but Paulus (little) had more true wisdom than he.

There is an amazing similarity between the punishment of Elymas and Paul's own experience at conversion, whilst the Roman Paulus (and Saul was a freeborn Roman) in his acceptance of the Truth, presented the pattern of the

Apostle's own conversion. It could be, that this incident made such an impression upon Saul, that from henceforth he preferred to be known as Paul.

Saul signifies *Asked for* or *Demanded*, and this Sergius Paulus had done; but Paul means *Little*, and it became the name adopted by Paul who considered himself to be "the least of the Apostles" and not worthy to be called one because he persecuted the Ecclesia (1 Cor. 15:9).

Moreover, the attack of Elymas had brought Paul to the forefront of the little company. From now on he took the lead, and Barnabas followed. It was not a case of self-assertion, but the natural development of a man who was selected by Yahweh as a leader. The lovable, self-effacing Barnabas readily adapted himself to the change, so that now, the little team of preachers became known as "Paul and his company" (Acts 13:13).

There is a further apparent play upon names in the narrative of this incident. Elymas was also known as Bar-Jesus, which signifies *Son of Salvation*, but Paul, when he addressed him, called him the son of the devil (Acts 13:10). This is similar to the language used by the Lord himself when addressing disbelieving Jews. They claimed to be true descendants of Abraham and looked upon God as their Father (John 8:41), but the Lord told them that their works and words showed the fallacy of such a claim, and declared:

"Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own; for he is a liar,

and the father of it" (John 8:44).

Those words truly describe Elymas and justified Paul's description of him as a Son of the Devil, or the flesh, the great calumniator of mankind.

From Paphos to Perga — John Mark Returns

The little company of pioneers weighed anchor from Paphos for Perga in Pamphylia. Perga was the capital of the province. It was about seven and a half miles inland on the river Cestrus, which is navigable, and along which their ship would have sailed.

Pamphylia signifies *Every Tribal* indicating its then heterogeneous population, for it was inhabited by a mixed race from all parts. The large, familiar Jewish communities of Cyprus were not in evidence here. The travellers found themselves in a strange place, and among a harsh, heathen people. Moreover, their path was barred by the mighty chain of Taurus mountains beyond which were semi-barbarous people of strange, foreign languages, and a region frequented by brigands and robbers who successfully defied the unsettled government, and preyed on travellers such as themselves. Being conscientious objectors, having no defence but that of faith itself, the adventure before them was one calculated to challenge the boldest, and was too much for Mark. He decided to return to Jerusalem.

Why Did Mark Return?

What caused Mark to leave Paul and Barnabas and return to Jerusalem? We are not specifically told, but it was sufficient to cause friction between Paul and Barnabas, for the former did not feel

that it was justified (Acts 15:37-39). In fact, Paul felt the matter so deeply as to prefer to sever his partnership with Barnabas rather than take Mark on the next journey.

Several reasons could have contributed to Mark's defection.

It could have been that the three brethren had already experienced severe persecution in Cyprus, and in view of the possibility of even worse to come from the barbarous country they were about to enter, Mark lost his courage. In support of this theory, Paul lists sufferings that he endured that have not been recorded in the *Acts of the Apostles* (2 Cor. 11:23-28), and some of these may have occurred in Cyprus.

Alternatively, it may have been that Mark resented the manner in which Paul was becoming the dominant influence, and found his dedicated, driving urge to work less pleasant than the ways of the more relaxed, gentler Barnabas, his cousin. Paul was one who not only relentlessly drove himself, but, at that stage, tended to become impatient with others who gave lesser service. Later, towards the end

of his life, Paul wrote to Timothy:

"You have fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, fidelity, long-suffering, love, endurance, persecutions, afflictions, which came upon me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured; but out of them all the Lord delivered me" (2 Tim. 3:10-11).

Those words describe the very journey he was about to embark upon, and from which Mark turned back. Mark could see in the attitude of Paul what was expected of him. Paul was desperately ill at the time, and some change of plan for recuperation was necessary. They could either ascend into the wild mountainous region that lay before them with its difficulties and dangers, or else turn back. Paul refused to capitulate despite his physical weakness; Mark, however, turned back.

Perhaps he was home-sick. Mark was young; the novelty of work had worn off. He did not find working with Paul easy. He was a city-dweller from Jerusalem, and unused to such rigors. As his thoughts turned back home, he remembered the persecution, and his mother, and perhaps desired to be with her to help her at such

SERGIVS PAULUS AND THE ACCURACY OF LUKE

The accuracy of Luke in calling him a proconsul used to be strongly called in question on the grounds that the province was not so governed. But evidence has been uncovered to show that Cyprus was an Imperial province until B.C. 22 when it became a Senatorial province, which meant that it was no longer governed by an Imperial Legate, but by a proconsul . . . A Greek inscription at Soloi bears the title: "In the Proconsulship of Paulus." — From *Luke The Historian*.

"Sergivus Paulus . . . is twice named by Pliny in the list of authors placed at the commencement of his work . . . It is not a little remarkable that the two books, lib. 2 and lib. 18 for which Sergivus Paulus is quoted, are just those which contain accounts of the heavenly bodies, and prognostications from the sun, moon etc. which doubtless formed the staple of Elymas's science . . . Pliny (Nat. His.) spoke of a school of magic art in Cyprus taught by Jews . . ." — A. C. Hervey, *The Acts Of The Apostles*.

a time.

Any, or all, of these considerations may have influenced Mark. In any case, he returned, leaving Paul and Barnabas to fend for themselves.

It is a testimony to the strength

of Mark's character, that though Paul refused to overlook this defection at the time, the young disciple lived and acted so as to justify Barnabas' faith in him, and receive the commendation of Paul (see Col. 4:10).



AT ANTIOCH IN PISIDIA

(Acts 13:14-52)

Ill-health Causes Paul To Visit Galatia

Paul did not stay sufficiently long in Perga to preach the Gospel, though he did so on his return to that city (Acts 13:14, 25). Evidently something prevented him doing so, and caused him to seek the higher regions beyond, towards the Pisidian Antioch, which was then within the province of Galatia.

In his *Epistle to the Galatians*, Paul explains that it was ill-health that caused him to do this. Some have suggested that the fever-infested plain of Pamphylia could have brought on an attack of intermittent malaria, which could have the effect of drastically altering his bodily appearance, and cause him to seek relief in the healthier, higher regions. The effect of such an attack has been described as follows:

"In some constitutions, malaria fever tends to recur in very distressing and prostrating paroxysms, whenever one's energies are taxed for a great effort. Such an attack is for the time absolutely incapacitating; the sufferer can only rest and feel himself a shaking

and helpless weakling, when he ought to be at work. He feels a contempt and loathing for self, and believes that others feel equal contempt and loathing" (W. M. Ramsay).

A lesser man would have turned back, but not Paul. His ruthless driving energy fed by a tremendous faith, spurred him on. He was determined to carry out the commission given him in spite of his illness, and now essayed the dangerous and difficult journey through the lonely brigand-infested region of Pisidia. Perhaps this partly was the cause of Mark's action. He felt himself unequal to maintaining such an effort as that, and returned home.

Later, in revealing the circumstances that caused him to preach throughout Galatia, Paul wrote:

"You know how that through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first. And my trial which was in my flesh you despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus . . . I bear you record, that, if it had been possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me" (Gal. 4:14-15).

Character Of The People

Antioch was about 100 miles north of Perga, by a route that ran through a mountainous district that was both difficult and dangerous. It was populated by a rough, half-savage people, and infested with robbers. Augustus, about 25 B.C., determined to tame these fierce bandits by a chain of posts which included Antioch and Lystra on the northern side, but he was only partially successful. In A.D. 74, Pisidia was linked to the Pamphylian plain in the province of Pamphylia. In Paul's day, therefore, Pisidia was treated as part of Galatia, so that in entering Pisidia, Paul entered Galatia. That fact must be borne in mind when considering the explanation that Paul made to the Galatians regarding the change of plan that caused him to visit their region.

Meanwhile, the area through which Paul and Barnabas moved as they travelled from Perga to Antioch, was extremely dangerous, and could have inspired his autobiographical comment about "perils of robbers" in 2 Cor. 11:26.

The warm-hearted, and rather emotional, character of the Galatians is referred to by Paul in his epistle. The expression he uses suggests that those of the region who embraced the Truth did so enthusiastically, whilst they also deeply sympathised with Paul in his distress. Far from being repelled by his condition and appearance (Gal. 4:13-14), they saw the influence of Christ in his dedicated activity (Gal. 2:20), and it excited their sympathy and love for him. They went out of their way to relieve his sufferings, acknowledging the great blessings they had received through his ministra-

tions (Gal. 4:15).

The enthusiastic response that Paul received from them, perhaps indicates that the Galatians tended to be moved by emotion, and were somewhat unstable in that they were easily swayed (cp. Gal. 4:17-18, with Acts 14:11). In character they seemed to be somewhat gullible and easily moved (Gal. 1:6).

These were the people among whom Paul was about to preach the Gospel.

In The Synagogue At Antioch

Antioch, the first city in the Galatian area visited by Paul, is called "Antioch of Pisidia," but it was not really in Pisidia at all, but on the Pisidian side of Phrygia, which Mark Antony gave to Amyntas, last king of Galatia. It was a busy city on a main caravan route, and therefore strategically valuable for the proclamation of the Truth. It contained a Jewish population, with a large synagogue, and this was used by Paul to commence his preaching.

On the sabbath, therefore, Paul and Barnabas made their way to the synagogue, and took their seats among the congregation. The entrance of two such men, strangers to Antioch, was noted by the presiding minister. Some knowledge of a synagogue service will be helpful in following the narrative in Acts. Following prayer, the First Lesson, or *Parashah*, was read, it being a section of the Law. This was followed by the *Haphtarah*, or reading from the Prophets. Then an exposition was normally given. Frequently this would be delivered by any distinguished stranger who may happen to be present, and who would be invited to do so by the chief ruler

of the synagogue.

On this occasion, the eyes of many would have already been fixed upon the two strangers who had entered the synagogue that day, and possibly it was already known that they came from Jerusalem. Here was an ideal opportunity of hearing an exposition from one who came from the very centre of Judaism, from the Holy City itself. Accordingly, the invitation was extended to either of them to address the assembly, if they had words of comfort or instruction to speak to their fellow Israelites (Acts 13:15).

It was an excellent opportunity to advance the Truth. Moreover, the set readings for the day, lent themselves to it. A close analysis of the discourse of Paul suggests that his comments were based upon Deuteronomy 1 and Isaiah 1. For example, he began by pointing out that the "God of Israel" had "chosen the fathers, and exalted the people" of Israel, which finds its origin in Isaiah 1:2; and then he spoke of how Yahweh "suffered their manners in the wilderness," or, according to some (see margin), how "He bare them as a nursing father in the wilderness," which links the statement with Deuteronomy 1:31.

Now, according to the Soncino Edition of the Pentateuch and Haftorahs, Deuteronomy 1-3:22 and Isaiah 1:1-22 were read in conjunction on the same sabbath. It comments:

"The Haftorahs read on the three Sabbaths preceding that fast (the 9th of Av, the Fall of Jerusalem) are called Haftorahs of Rebuke. For the third Sabbath Devarim, the opening chapter of Isaiah — the Great Arraignment of Judah — has been selected in order to warn all generations in Israel of the moral and social trans-

gressions that led to the downfall of the Jewish State."

Now that is the very theme of Paul's discourse, suggesting that the reading for the day was from Deuteronomy 1 and Isaiah 1. It is highly significant that those readings were read on a sabbath preceding the fast commemorating the Fall of Jerusalem, and were called an Haftorah of Rebuke. Thus the very time setting was appropriate to Paul's address. It was an ideal opportunity to warn the Jews that the rebelliousness of their leaders in Jerusalem in relation to their Messiah could only result in a further overthrow of the Jewish State such as the prophet Habakkuk had predicted (see Acts 13:27, 40-41). Therefore, whilst celebrating the Fall of Jerusalem, there was a need to beware lest an even worse calamity take place in their day.

That was the subject to which Paul addressed himself as he was called upon to speak. Quickly assessing the situation, moved with emotion at such an opening for the preaching of the Truth, he accepted the invitation to speak, and standing up in his place in an excess of feeling (for normally the speaker sat down — Luke 4:20), he gestulated with his hand and commenced:

"Men of Israel, and you that fear God (i.e. Gentile proselytes), give audience . . ."

Paul's address, which Luke records in some detail, is a masterly exposition of the readings for the day, illustrated by recent events (the crucifixion of Christ), supported by prophecy, and rounded off by a personal appeal based on a warning of judgment to come (vv. 40-41). It was such an ex-

position as was calculated to appeal to the Jews and proselytes gathered together in the synagogue. It can be divided into four main sections:

1. *The Promise of Scripture of a King* — vv. 16-22

a. The God of Israel called the nation out of Egypt — v. 17;

b. In His love He cared for it and protected it — vv. 18-20;

c. He established it as His Kingdom and provided it with a faithful ruling dynasty — vv. 21-22.

2. *The Claim that Jesus fulfils the Divine Purpose* — vv. 23-31

a. Jesus Christ came in the line of David as Saviour — v. 23;

b. John Baptist witnessed to that fact — vv. 24-25;

c. The Jews of the Diaspora should accept the Gospel though it was rejected by those in the land through their refusal to carefully heed that which was read continuously in the synagogues — vv. 26-27;

d. The death of Jesus fulfilled the requirements of Scripture — vv. 28-29;

e. His resurrection was attested by reliable living witnesses — vv. 30-31;

3. *The Confirmation of Scripture of His Death and Resurrection* — vv. 32-37

a. The death and resurrection of Messiah was predicted — vv. 32-35.

b. The prophecies could not apply to David as was sometimes taught — vv. 36-37;

4. *Personal Appeal And Warning In View Of Impending National Judgment* — vv. 38-41

a. Forgiveness of sins and salvation is offered through the name of Jesus — vv. 38-39;

b. Impending national judgment, predicted by the prophets, would destroy the Temple worship — vv. 40-41.

Paul appealed to his audience on the basis of the hope of Israel. He did not attempt to turn them away from the Law, but to show how that it was designed as a schoolmaster to lead them to Christ (Gal. 3:24). He expound-

ed the Law, revealed how that it emphasised the reality of sin, but could not justify therefrom in the absence of the redeemer, the Messiah (Acts 13:38-39).

During the course of his address Paul often drew the attention of the Jews to the evidence of Scripture by directly quoting it, though, at other times he inferred that the evidence could be supplied. For example, he declared that the Jews in Jerusalem fulfilled the Scriptures which they read every sabbath day, by failing to recognise the Messiah as such, and in condemning him to death. This was a provocative statement, and the absence of Scriptural proof could well cause those who were interested to think the matter out for themselves, or else seek further information by a personal approach.

It is a very effective form of presenting the Truth.

In the quotations that Paul did make, he frequently provided slight variations of both the Hebrew and Greek texts of the Old Testament, suggesting that he was either quoting from memory, or providing the general sense of the original. Further, he followed the practise of establishing a proposition by linking Scripture with Scripture; thus Isaiah 55:3 is joined with Psalm 16:10 to prove that the Lord Jesus would be raised from the dead to life eternal.

The prophecy of Habakkuk 1:5 which he quoted in concluding his address, predicted the overthrow of Jerusalem, and thus of the Temple. It therefore constituted a warning against placing confidence in the mere formalism of the Law, now that the antitype had come. Even with the Temple

in existence, the Law of Moses could not provide real justification from sins, unless those involved saw clearly the forgiveness provided by the Redeemer who had come as the antitype of the sacrifices offered. This would be made apparent when the prophecy of Habakkuk was fulfilled, and the nation overthrown because it rejected Yahweh's mercy.

The propositions established by Paul's discourse can be summarised thus:

- Israel's development was through Divine providence;
- David was promised a seed: the Messiah;
- John Baptist testified that Jesus was that seed;
- The Jews of Jerusalem slew him but God raised him;
- The Scriptures required this;
- His death and resurrection were sacrificial;
- Justification through forgiveness of sins, such as the Law of Moses could not provide, is obtainable through him;
- Prophecy shows that the end of the Temple worship was at hand;
- As individuals they should accept the way of life in Christ.

The Impression Caused By Paul's Address

Paul's powerfully reasoned address produced a deep impression upon both the Jews and their Gentile proselytes. Immediately on its conclusion, the two brethren, having made their way outside, were accosted by excited members of the concourse as they streamed out of the synagogue. Many requested that further instruction along the same lines should be given, and arrangements were made for this to be done during the ensuing week.*

Others were even more impressed and enthusiastic, and refused to wait even a day. A number of Jews and proselytes accompanied Paul and Barnabas to where they were staying, and requested further instruction. Some were converted and accepted Christ in the way appointed, and were exhorted by the two preachers to remain steadfast in their conviction, and so "continue in the grace of God."

It had been ill-health that had driven Paul and Barnabas into the regions of Galatia, but now an amazing door of utterance had been opened to them. Obviously, these circumstances were divinely guided.

Opposition From The Jewish Leaders

During the ensuing week, tidings of these matters spread throughout the city. This resulted in a vast audience of both Jews and Gentiles from all classes, and so representative of all the city, assembling together in the synagogue on the following sabbath to hear the Word of God.

The enthusiasm manifested aroused the enmity of the chief Jews. There was evidently a proselyting zeal in this synagogue, indicated by the large number of Gentiles who had embraced Judaism and joined its membership (vv. 16, 43), and as the leaders saw the crowds attracted by the two strangers, they were moved with jealousy. Accordingly, they went out of their way to destroy the influence of Paul's teaching. Openly interjecting as he expounded the Scriptures, they contradicted him. Then, as he effectively

* The words "the Gentiles besought" should not appear. The R.V. renders the passage (Acts 13:42), "And as they went out, they besought that these words," etc.

answered their objections, they commenced to blaspheme by asserting untruths. They manifested all the stubbornness for which Jews are notorious, and displayed a hard-hearted indifference to the appeal of the Word as the Apostles submitted it to them.

It was impossible to continue under such circumstances. As tempers heated, Paul and Barnabas recognised that it was best to put an end to the scene, and to cease participation in a form of argument and recrimination that could only end in ungodly debate and riots. Indignantly, they turned on to the Jews:

"It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you" they declared, "but seeing you thrust it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For so has the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set you to be a light to the Gentiles, that you should be for salvation unto the ends of the earth!"

This was a very bold statement, as Luke observes, because it applied a prophecy to the Apostles that has application to the Messiah. How could they do so? Because they acted as the ambassadors of Christ, speaking in his name and with his authority (2 Cor. 5:18-21; Eph. 6:20). They were really an extension of Christ (Luke 10:16), for as he is the head of the multitudinous body, they were officially appointed representatives of its members.

Why should Paul claim that it was "necessary" that the word of God should be preached first to the Jews? Because it was commanded. And why was it so commanded? For the reason we have constantly suggested; namely, because this was an act of mercy towards this people in answer to

the Lord's prayer on their behalf (Luke 23:34). The Acts of the Apostles, therefore, records Yahweh's final plea to Israel before the nation was scattered. When this plea was officially and finally rejected, as it subsequently was by the Jews of Jerusalem and Rome (the Jewish and Gentile capitals of the world), the Truth was directly proclaimed to Gentiles without this restriction. Until then, however, Paul's practise was to seek out cities for the proclamation of the word in which were found synagogues, and he established it as a principle that the Gospel should be proclaimed "to the Jews first, and afterwards to the Gentiles" (Rom. 1:16).

We do not follow that principle today because the command does not now apply.

Gentiles Seek The Truth

Paul's teaching that the prophetic Scriptures proclaim the purpose of Yahweh to extend His salvation to Gentiles on terms of equality with Jews, was accepted by the Gentile section of his audience with enthusiasm. Many glorified the word of the Lord by readily accepting the Truth and seeking baptism.

As a result, an Ecclesia was formed, and this Antioch (like Antioch in Syria) became a centre for extending the Truth throughout the region.

However, though the Jewish leaders had been put to the rout in this initial skirmish with Paul, they were not prepared to concede total defeat. Having been worsted in debate, they sought other means. They exercised considerable commercial influence throughout the city, besides which, among the proselytes were many devout

women of honorable status. They warned their Gentile business associates that it might not be to their advantage if they allowed Paul's influence to go unchecked and at the same time, urged on the devout women of the synagogue to use their influence on husbands to the same end. Thus contention and opposition grew, and Paul and Barnabas found themselves subjected to pressures from both religious and commercial quarters.

Finally the Roman authorities were called in to calm the growing agitation. They were tolerant of religion, but opposed to fanaticism or religious controversy, and so long as any sect was prepared to behave peaceably, they were quite willing to afford it protection. However, they were not prepared to allow a city to become unsettled through political or religious controversy. As they reviewed the situation in Antioch they could

sense danger and assessing that the trouble had commenced since the arrival of Paul and Barnabas, they ordered their expulsion from the boundaries of the city.

Shaking off the dust of Antioch against those responsible for this action, Paul and Barnabas made their way towards Iconium, which was under a different jurisdiction. Paul was still sick from the malarial infection he had contacted (if this is the case), but was buoyed up by the wonderful results of the adventures he had successfully come through, and which had set his feet more firmly on the path of preaching to Gentiles.

They left behind them the newly formed Ecclesia. Saddened as the brethren of this Ecclesia were to see Paul and Barnabas leave, they were filled with joy in the new-found Truth, and in the uplifting influence of the spirit-word.

THREATENED AT ICONIUM

(Acts 14:1-5)

"In Journeys Often"

Expelled from Antioch, Paul and Barnabas made their way in a south-easterly direction to Iconium at the western edge of the vast central plains of Asia Minor. They probably took the Royal Road about eighteen miles south of Neapolis. After about another eighteen miles, at the north end of the Lake Karalis, they left the Royal Road and travelled almost due east to Iconium; a total distance of about eighty miles.

Iconium stood on a level plateau about 3400 feet above sea-level. About six miles west of the city, mountains rise to a height of almost 6000 feet. From them a

stream flowed down into the city, and other smaller streams flowed into the adjacent area making the land extremely fertile. To the east lay the plains of Lycaonia.

Preaching In The Synagogue

There was a synagogue in Iconium and this provided opportunity to preach the Word. But first, accommodation would have to be arranged, and suitable employment found. They would find both, doubtless, among the Jewish community of the city.

On the sabbath they presented themselves at the synagogue. Once again they were invited to speak, and though the form of address

is not recorded, it made such an impression that many of the Jews and proselytes present believed.

Once again this stirred up the bitter animosity of the unbelieving Jews, and the synagogue became the weekly scene of furious contention. However, they did not openly oppose Paul and Barnabas, possibly feeling that they lacked the ability to successfully encounter them in verbal debate. Instead, they shrewdly realised that the best way to discredit the teaching of Paul was to influence the leading citizens against him on a political issue, and leave it to the authorities to move in the matter as they had done in Antioch.

Therefore, the unbelieving Jews persuaded the authorities that these preachers who had been ejected from Antioch, were dangerous agitators who would disturb the peace of the city. In so doing, they "made their minds evil affected towards the brethren."

An Ecclesia Established

This opposition did not deter Paul and Barnabas. In fact, the contention advertised the Truth, and caused others to investigate its claims. This was what they wanted. Accordingly, they remained there some time, speaking fearlessly and forthrightly in spite of the threats now being uttered; and undeterred by the signs of a gathering storm which were becoming increasingly apparent. So long as

they had an audience, Paul and Barnabas maintained their preaching. Their action found endorsement in that many miracles were performed there, and this stimulated further public interest in their labours.

Thus, out of the controversy and opposition that the two brethren received in Iconium, an Ecclesia was established.

Meanwhile the enemy also had been busy, spreading lying insinuations on all sides.

This policy was so successful that the entire city became divided into pro-Christian and anti-Christian factions.

A Plan To Kill Paul And Barnabas

At last the spirit of faction grew so hot that the leaders of the hostile party plotted to murder the two preachers. They agitated in such a way as to arouse the most violent passions. Both Jews and Gentiles joined in this, the idea being to so incite Paul and Barnabas by their threats as to cause them to retaliate, and then to stone them. The leaders of the Jews would thus be rid of their opponents whilst, at the same time, escaping responsibility for the murders.

But Paul and Barnabas became aware of the plot, and adjudging that their work in the city was now at an end, they left it for Lystra about eighteen miles to the south-west of Iconium.

PREACHING AT LYSTRA

(Acts 14:6-20)

In Lystra

Lystra was in southern Lycania, off the beaten track, obscure and remote from the centre of civilisation, a backwater of a city.

The hurried flight of Barnabas and Paul from Iconium would have brought them to this city in about a day.

Perhaps they felt the need of

recuperation from the tiring excitement of the preaching in recent weeks, particularly in view of Paul's illness. If this was the reason that caused them to retire to Lystra, it was obviously divinely controlled, for events occurred there that greatly changed the course of Paul's future. Among the few Jewish inhabitants of this backward town was a young man by name of Timotheus, who became greatly impressed with the message of Paul, and afterwards became one of the principal associates (Acts 16:1).

There was a small Jewish population in Lystra, but apparently no synagogue. The Jews would welcome such visitors as Paul and Barnabas, and to them the Apostle preached Jesus. Others were attracted to the message, so that soon the preaching became a regular instruction.

Conversion Of Timothy

Timotheus, or Timothy, as he is better known, was the son of a Greek who had married a Jewess (Acts 16:1). It was a divided household, and therefore not a particularly happy one, and this could have had some impact upon Timothy causing him to be rather shy. Timothy's father did not accept Judaism, and in consequence, Timothy was not circumcised. On the other hand, his mother Eunice was a spiritually-minded woman, who doubtless regretted the mistake she made in marrying out of her belief. Following the influence of her mother Lois, Eunice retained her reverence for the things of God, and this played an important part in the ultimate conversion of Timothy (2 Tim. 1:5).

Though Timothy was not circumcised, and thus did not em-

brace Judaism in its completeness, he had been taught in the Scriptures by both his mother and grandmother (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:14-15). This gave him a knowledge and a faith that rose superior to his physical disability.

For Timothy was not robust in physique. In fact he had an in-born timidity against which he had to struggle (2 Tim. 1:7), and when emotion got the better of him, he easily gave way to tears (2 Tim. 1:4). Moreover, he was frequently ill (1 Tim. 5:23), and so gave every appearance of weakness.

But, in fact, the only weak thing about this young man was his physical condition. He had a deep reverence for God, and a determination to carry out His will. He had been greatly impressed by his study of the Word, and its influence had been seen in his demeanour before Paul appeared on the scene (2 Tim. 1:5). He listened to the preaching of the Apostle, and was greatly impressed. He felt drawn to the Apostle himself, and greatly admired the courage, faith and skill by which he conducted his preaching in the city. In due course, he presented himself for baptism, thus becoming a son of the Apostle in the faith (1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2; 1 Cor. 4:17). Little did Paul realise, when this rather weak young man presented himself for baptism, and gave his confession of faith, that he was destined to carry on the great work that he had commenced, and would do so with outstanding courage, determination and skill.

Probably through very timidity, Timothy did not obtrude on the Apostle during his two visits to

Lystra on this journey, so that there was nothing to commend him to the attention of the Apostle above others who had been baptised.

A Crippled Man Healed

On one occasion, as Paul was expounding the Word, he noticed a crippled man listening with every evidence of sincerity and enthusiasm. He was well-known in Lystra, for he had been a cripple from birth, and had never walked.

Paul could see that the Gospel had had a profound effect upon him, and that he was a man of faith. Suddenly, in a loud voice, and to the astonishment of the crowd, he addressed him:

"Stand upright on your feet!"

To the onlookers it must have seemed a cruel and stupid thing to say, but to their amazement, this man whom they knew to have been crippled from birth, did so, and as he felt a strength in his feet that he had never previously experienced, he leaped and walked as he experimented with them.

It was a similar experience to the miracle of the cured lame man at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple, as performed by Peter (Acts 3).

And in the same way it excited the amazement and interest of the people. They chanted in the native language of Lycaonia:

"The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men!" "The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men!"

They called Barnabas Zeus or Jupiter, and Paul Hermes or Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker.

And from this we can perhaps gain some knowledge of the appearance of these two men. The

god Zeus was represented as aged, large, venerable; and this may well have been the appearance of Barnabas. On the other hand, Hermes or Mercurius is younger, smaller, active and eloquent, such as Paul must have appeared at that time.

Looking upon Paul and Barnabas as manifestations of their gods, the people were anxious to pay them the reverence that they felt was due unto them.

Paul's Open-Air Address

Of the two gods mentioned, Zeus, or Jupiter, was considered to be of higher status to the people of Lystra. It was common then, for cities to be placed under the protection of a god, and Lystra was under the protection of Zeus. A statue of the god stood before the principal gate of the city.

Believing that the god himself had visited the city in the person of Barnabas, the priest of Zeus arranged for a public celebration and worship. Sacrificial oxen decorated with flowers were led before the city gate, and a great concourse of people were gathered there for the purpose.

Paul and Barnabas were ignorant of the significance of all this. They had heard the chanting shouts of the people, but because (as Luke observes) this had been in "the speech of Lycaonia", they had not understood what it was all about. They had seen the crowds gathered at the gate of the city, and observed the decorated oxen and pagan priests there, and doubtless had made their way there in sad curiosity at the superstitious ignorance of the people. But they had no understanding that this was all to honour them! This, however, became apparent

as the ceremony proceeded. Further enquiries revealed to them the true nature of affairs. They learnt with dismay that their act of mercy and faith in healing the crippled man had so miscarried as to support the very worship they had preached to overthrow.

Tearing their clothes in order to openly manifest their protest, they sprang out into the path of the procession, expostulating with the people, calling upon them to see that they were but ordinary mortals like themselves, and proclaiming that the very purpose of their mission was to turn them away from such empty and stupid worship, to embrace the truth concerning the Creator of heaven and earth.

"Sirs," they declared, "what foolish-

ness is this that you are doing? We are human, with emotions as yourselves. We are bringing you the good news to turn away from these useless things to the living God Who made heaven, earth, sea, and everything they contain. In days gone by He let all the nations go their own ways, though He did not leave Himself without evidence as Benefactor; for He gave you rain from heaven and fruitful seasons and supplied you nourishment and enjoyment to your heart's content."

Yet even though they thus spoke, it was with extreme difficulty that they restrained the people from sacrificing unto them. They were probably a little ashamed of their previous enthusiasm, and were reluctant to acknowledge their folly. Yet as their supposed "gods" disclaimed that they were such, they were compelled to submit!

PAUL'S OPEN-AIR ADDRESS

Paul's address is impregnated with references from the Old Testament, and is based directly upon Psalm 146:6: "Yahweh made heaven, and earth, the sea, and all that therein is; which keepeth truth for ever." In such circumstances as he experienced in Lystra, the mind of the Apostle automatically turned to the Scriptures. He had the ability to quickly adapt himself to every situation, and to use even distressing circumstances as opportunities to proclaim the Word. A summary of his address on this occasion is as follows:

- **God, the Creator, is alone to be worshipped;**
- **He is living and active, having created all things;**
- **In the past He revealed Himself only to Israel;**
- **Yet all nations experienced His active presence: for rain and sunshine, seasons and harvest came from Him.**
- **Gentiles should turn from inanimate idols to worship the living, active, powerful God of creation.**

Paul Stoned

The fickle Lycaonians, having been denied their celebrations, now felt a sullen resentment against those whom they previously would have worshipped. They cast around in their minds for some reason to explain away their foolish actions, and at the same time discredit Paul and Barnabas.

They found it in the agitation of some Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who had made it their business to follow the two preachers and destroy the influence they were exerting.

It did not take much argument on the part of these Jews to persuade the people of Lystra that Paul was a danger to the peace of

the city, and that his teaching should be avoided at all costs. Indeed, they so played upon the feelings of these somewhat backward, and certainly ignorant, people, as to rouse such resentment against Paul that they would gladly have murdered him.

And this nearly happened. The aroused mob, coming upon the Apostle, gave vent to their feelings in invective and violence. Their insults which he doubtless would have ignored, were followed with violence. Soon Paul found himself in the midst of a crowd of people of murderous intent. Rocks were aimed at him with such venom that he suffered concussion, and lay in the dust of the street bloodied and unconscious. Believing him to be dead, they dragged him through the streets of the city and flung him outside, perhaps before the very image of Zeus where they previously would have done him honour.

The members of the recently formed Ecclesia were witnesses to this outrage. Filled with horror at what they believed to be the death of the one who had brought them the message of love and life, they gathered around his body, perhaps

to save it from further abuse and indignities. They had witnessed in the sufferings of the Apostle a vivid example of what dedication to the Truth can really lead to. Perhaps Timothy was a sad witness of these things? Later, Paul wrote to him:

"You have fully known my doctrine, manner of life . . . persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured; but out of them all the Lord delivered me" (2 Tim. 3:9-10).

"You, therefore, endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2 Tim. 2:3).

Again, in outlining the trials he had endured for the Truth's sake, Paul listed this distressing experience:

"Once was I stoned," he wrote (2 Cor. 11:25).

Meanwhile, the brethren of Lystra stood protectively around the inert body of their beloved friend and brother, believing him to be dead. Then they saw him stir! He was not dead after all! Filled with delight they helped him to his feet and accompanied him back into the city. The brutal violence of the pagan people did not deter Paul.

PREACHING AT DERBE

(Acts 14:20-21)

On The Road To Derbe

Paul realised that it would not be safe for either him or the local brethren if he remained in Lystra whilst the temper of the people was so inflamed against him. And as the Lord had taught his disciples that when they were persecuted in one city they should move on to the next (Matt. 10:25), the two companions now shook the

dust of Lystra from their feet, and took the road to Derbe, over forty miles west of Lystra.

Confusion over the site of Derbe existed for some time, and it was originally identified with modern Gudelisin. However, discoveries in 1956 and 1962 have identified it with Kerti Huyuk, enabling the journey of Paul to be traced with greater certainty. It

was situated on the border of Galatia and Cilicia, and constituted the furthest point to which Paul and Barnabas travelled on this journey.

They apparently had a fruitful campaign at Derbe, and evidently remained there for some time. Since Derbe was near the Galatian border, and as Paul and Barnabas had entered the region of Galatia because of illhealth of the Apostle, the time had come to retrace their steps.

Actually, they could have moved on through the Sicilian pass to Tarsus, Paul's hometown, and on to Antioch. This, indeed, must have appeared a most attractive route to follow at the time. On the other hand, to retrace their steps would bring them into the area of personal danger through persecution. Yet they determined to do so. Why? Because they felt the need of consolidating and strengthening the small communities they had established. This was Paul's constant practise (see 1 Thess. 3:2-4). He was indifferent to personal danger, and saw only the needs of the Truth and

the brethren.

Before leaving Derbe, however, another notable disciple had embraced the Truth. Gaius was baptised. Later he became one of Paul's travelling companions (Acts 20:4), supporting the Apostle in the difficult journeys he took.

Thus in this journey through Galatia, which had been undertaken by the Apostle through sickness and was not in his original plan at all, at least two outstanding disciples were made: Timothy of Lystra (Acts 16:1), and Gaius of Derbe. Their selfless, dedicated service to the Apostle and the cause of Truth, was indicative of what the warmhearted Galatians were capable of manifesting when their emotions were channelled by the Word.

In addition, Ecclesias had been established in the various cities visited and many were now rejoicing in the Truth who were previously imprisoned in darkness. Thus out of distressing circumstances, a great benefit was received.

CONFIRMING THE BELIEVERS

Paul's Exhortation

Apparently Paul and Barnabas were not subjected to persecution in Derbe, for it is not included among the cities listed by the Apostle to Timothy, in which he suffered affliction (2 Tim. 3:11). Moreover, success attended their efforts there, for they "made many disciples" (Acts 14:21 - mg) before they established an Ecclesia there and then made ready to revisit the cities in which they had

already preached.

Their return journey was not to preach to strangers, but to "confirm the souls of the disciples." From place to place they delivered a single exhortation; one that was given added force by their own conduct. The theme was:

"We must continue to abide in the faith in spite of all opposition, for it is through much tribulation that we shall enter into the kingdom of God!"

What a powerful exhortation

from such men as Paul and Barnabas! The very fact that they had dared to return along a route that had been marked by violent persecution, testified that they were determined to "abide in the faith." And as for enduring tribulation, the bruises on Paul's body were a token of endurance. The Lord had warned the Apostles to expect such treatment (Matt. 10:21, 22, 38; 16:24; John 12:25-26; 16:1, 2, 33), and the Apostles passed the same message on to believers (Rom. 8:17; 1 Thess. 3:4; 2 Tim. 1:8; 2:11-12; 1 Pet. 4:12-16; Rev. 7:14).

Do we experience tribulation today? Not as did the Apostles or the first century Ecclesias, but in a different way we do. The word translated "tribulation" is *thlipsis* and signifies pressure or compression brought about by evils from without. The world exercises pressure upon us today in many ways. It makes demands upon us which we find difficult to avoid. Later, Paul claimed that such pressures are more difficult than actual violence (2 Tim. 3:1). But whether in active persecution, or in the pressures of the modern world, believers must generate sufficient faith to see beyond them, and press on to the Kingdom of God. Paul possibly told the brethren of Galatia, as he moved from place to place, that though there will be one individual in the Kingdom of God who never sinned, there will be nobody who has never been tried. Even the Son of God "learned obedience by the things that he suffered." It is only by building up a compensating pressure within that we will resist

that from without.

The Thoroughness Of Paul's Preaching

It was no hasty, sketchy exposition that Paul and Barnabas delivered to the believers as they went from place to place. That is shown by a consideration of the Epistle to the Galatians (the very area in which he was then preaching). Paul carefully instructed them. This is apparent from the subjects to which he briefly refers in the Epistle he wrote them. It refers to subjects such as Law, Justification by faith, Sonship in Christ; it frequently quotes from the Old Testament Scriptures, basing the elaboration of doctrine on the very use of words found therein; it treats of allegory founded on historical incidents, revealing that Paul must have carefully instructed them in the history of Israel. Thus his teaching involved Bible history, prophecy, allegory and doctrine.

He further illustrated the vast change wrought in one's life by Christ, by referring to his own personal experience and conversion (Gal. 1:13) he showed how his own endurance under suffering was an open placarding of Christ's sacrifice (Gal. 1:16; 2:20; 3:1) whose sufferings he thus fellow-shipped (Phil. 3:10). His exposition of the Law in relation to the Liberty in Christ clearly revealed the hopelessness of man apart from the Lord, and the glorious privilege obtained in the Gospel (Gal. 5:1). It was Paul's teaching of liberty in Christ that brought him under the censure of the Jews, and was partly responsible for the persecution

that he suffered at their hands (Gal. 5:11).

The Galatians enthusiastically embraced the Truth (Gal. 5:7). The gifts of the Holy Spirit were manifested among them (Gal. 3:5). Strengthened by the teaching of the Apostle and Barnabas they found the means of enduring the persecution that they, like them, now experienced (Gal. 3:4).

If the preaching of Paul and Barnabas to pagans had proved successful; their confirmation of the doctrine among those converted proved essential.

Paul and Barnabas carefully scrutinised the members of the various ecclesias, and guided by the Spirit they appointed certain

ones to the position of eldership. This was not a position governed by Ecclesial vote; it was not comparable to Arranging Brethren in Ecclesias today, but was an official appointment determined by the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

A great responsibility rested upon those elders to maintain the teaching and example provided by Paul and Barnabas. They needed the strength and communion of heaven to that end. Thus, on such occasions when elders were appointed, the Ecclesia was assembled; the appointment was made official by the Apostle; and after prayer and abstinence they were exhorted to seek the strength of the Lord Jesus on whom they believed.

PREACHING IN PERGA

An Ecclesia Established

The two valiant soldiers for Christ returned throughout Pisidia, calling upon the Ecclesias for this purpose. Wherever they went they were met with joy and enthusiasm by the believers, who willingly responded to the teaching and exhortation of Paul and Barnabas, and proclaimed their determination to maintain the faith at all costs, cheerfully shouldering its responsibilities.

So the two missionaries re-

turned to Perga. On the previous visit they had neglected to preach in this city, probably because of Paul's illness. But now he had recovered, and they preached the word there.

From there they went down to Attalia, a seaport about sixteen miles from Perga, and finding a ship about to leave for Antioch, they joined it as passengers, and so made their way over the Mediterranean to their home Ecclesia.

BACK IN ANTIOCH

Reporting To The Ecclesia

Paul and Barnabas returned to the Ecclesia in Antioch to report upon the results of their journey. The members of the Ecclesia were gathered together, and Paul outlined to them the results of their

preaching. It was obvious that a complete departure from previous methods had taken place. The converts were mainly from Gentiles, and from Gentiles who had had no previous understanding of the God of Israel. The brethren could

see that the work had not been conducted without personal sacrifice on the part of those who had undertaken it. Paul, particularly, showed clearly the effects of the illness and brutal opposition he had experienced whilst on travel (Gal. 6:17). He still suffered fits of acute suffering and intense depression (Gal. 1:10; 6:17), but he returned with a strong desire to continue on the work he had commenced, and to which he had been appointed.

The determination was even more strongly formed in him, and he could now see, more clearly than ever, that the work and destiny in life to which God had specially called him was to be the Apostle to the Gentiles (1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 5:11; Rom. 15:16; Eph. 3:6).

Paul remained at Antioch for a "long time," probably about two years.

Completion Of The First Journey

The first missionary journey properly ends with the arrival of Paul and Barnabas at Antioch. After staying there a "long time," Paul again visited Jerusalem to debate with the Judaizers. This happened about A.D.51, and as Paul departed on his first journey about A.D.46, it is necessary to divide the interval from A.D.46 to 51 between his journey through Galatia and his subsequent abode at Antioch. If the Apostle set forth somewhat late in the year A.D.46, he may possibly have returned towards the close of A.D. 48, occupying some two years in his journey. The years 49 and 50 were spent at Antioch, and in the year 51 he visited Jerusalem.

Paul's approximate age at the period of his first journey, therefore, would be approximately between 39 to 41.

CHRONOLOGY OF PAUL'S LIFE

This can be based upon five leading events, the dates of which can be set with reasonable certainty:

(1) — *The Conversion of Paul* — A.D. 37

This is calculated from Josephus in the light of 2 Cor. 11:32 which shows that Aretas was King of Arabia and in possession of Damascus when Paul escaped from the city three years after his conversion. That Paul, as a Jew, should have been able to act so freely against the Christians in the way indicated in Acts 9:2, implies that a Government was in power that was sympathetic to the Jews and to the reigning high priest. Aretas answers to the former qualification, and he became established in Damascus in place of Herod Antipas (who was hated of the Jews) in A.D. 37. In that same year, Theophilus became high priest in Jerusalem, and Paul applied to him for authority to move against the Jewish-Christians in Damascus.

(2) — *The Death of Herod Agrippa 1* — A.D. 44

This is recorded in Acts 12:23, and the date determines the return of Paul to Jerusalem with alms as occurring approximately A.D. 44-45. This was a time of recorded famine answering to the requirement of Acts 11:28.

(3) — Third Journey of Paul to Jerusalem — A.D. 51

According to Galatians 2:1 this was fourteen years after Paul's conversion. It followed his return to Antioch from the first missionary journey. This has been contested on the grounds that the visit to Jerusalem referred to in Galatians, was that recorded in Acts 11:26; 12:25, narrating incidents not there included. It is claimed that the Epistle was written before the Jerusalem Conference, on the grounds that otherwise the decision of the conference would surely have been quoted by Paul. Further, it is claimed that Gal. 1:17 demands that every visit to Jerusalem by the Apostle be recorded, and if Gal. 2:1-10 relates to the Jerusalem Conference, Paul omitted the visit recorded in Acts 11:26; 12:25 (See *Galatians* by J. Carter).

But in answer to this:

a. Paul is not listing his visits to Jerusalem, but his contact with the Apostles, and the visit of Acts 11:26; 12:25 took place when persecution had driven them from the city (Acts 12:1, 19), or made it inconvenient for them to meet Paul. This was well known by the Ecclesias, and there was no point in mentioning it to the Galatians. Further, if the visit to Jerusalem mentioned in Galatians 2:1-10 related to that recorded in Acts 11:26, it is passing strange that the Apostles should urge Paul that he "should remember the poor" (Gal. 1:10), seeing that he had visited Jerusalem on that occasion for that very purpose (Acts 11:26). We believe that the visit to Jerusalem mentioned by the Apostle to the Galatians was for the purpose of the Conference.

b. Paul states that the visit was fourteen years after his conversion which took place in the year 37, which brings the time of the Jerusalem visit to 51. Paul's second visit to Jerusalem after his conversion (Acts 11:26; 12:25) was during the period of the persecution which terminated with the death of Herod in 44; and fourteen years before that date is far too early for Paul's conversion.

c. Paul's statement in Gal. 5:11 implies that some were making capital out of his action in circumcising Timothy (See p.120 of *Galatians* by J. Carter), but this did not take place until after the Jerusalem Conference (Acts 16:1).

d. We conclude, therefore, that the Jerusalem Conference took place in the year A.D. 51, and was the purpose of the visit referred to by Paul in Galatians 2.

(4) — The Procuratorship of Felix — A.D. 60-61

According to Josephus, Tacitus, and Suetonius, Felix was superseded by Festus in A.D. 60-61. Upon this date depends the Apostle's arrest in Jerusalem, and his journey to Rome. His captivity at Caesarea which followed the arrest continued for two years, and must have commenced approximately A.D. 58-59 (Acts 24:27).

(5) — The Arrival of Paul in Rome — A.D. 61-62

This followed immediately after the entrance of Festus into his office. These dates provide the structure upon which can be built the chronology of the Acts, and the ministry of the Apostle Paul.

SYRIAN ANTIOCH (13:1-3) Paul, Barnabas, and John Mark and perhaps others began journey. From here travelled about 16 miles to Seleucia.

SELEUCIA (13:4) [A port on Mediterranean Sea] From here sailed about 130 miles to Salamis in Cyprus. *Barnabas was a native of Cyprus (Acts 4:36) and Jews of Cyprus had helped out at Antioch (11:20-21), so Paul, Barnabas and John Mark went to help out in Cyprus.*

SALAMIS (13:5) [Greatest port and commercial center in Cyprus] Paul and Barnabas preached in synagogue. John Mark was helping them. From here went about 100 miles thru whole island to Paphos.

PAPHOS (13:6-12) [Capitol of Cyprus] Preached to Proconsul, Sergius Paulus. Blinded Elymas, the magician. From here sailed about 180 miles to Perga in Pamphylia.

PERGA (13:13) John Mark returned to Jerusalem (cp. 15:36-40) From here travelled about 100 miles north to Pisidian Antioch. *This was a very dangerous journey thru mountains filled with robbers (cp. 2 Cor. 11:28). Paul may have changed plans and headed for Antioch because he had contracted malaria and needed to live in higher lands. Antioch is about 2600 feet above sea level.*

PISIDIAN ANTIOCH (13:14-50) [Antioch was a main stop on great eastern trade routes from Ephesus to the Euphrates and would be a good place to spread the gospel] Paul exhorted on sabbath and next sabbath almost whole city came to hear him. Jealous Jews contradicted and reviled Paul so he and Barnabas turned to Gentiles. Jews stirred

up persecution and drove them out. From here travelled 80 miles to Iconium.

ICONIUM (13:51-14:5) Preached in synagogues and converted both Jews and Gentiles. Worked miracles. Unbelieving Jews stirred up Jews and Gentiles and rulers to molest and stone Paul and Barnabas. From here they fled about 20 miles to Lystra of Lycaonia.

LYSTRA (14:8-20) Paul healed crippled man. Paul called Hermes and Barnabas called Zeus. People tried to sacrifice to them. Jews from Antioch and Iconium persuaded the people to stone Paul and drag him out of Lystra, thinking he was dead. Disciples gathered around Paul and he rose up and entered Lystra again. Next day they travelled about 20 miles to Derbe.

DERBE (14:20-21) Preached and made many disciples. From here travelled back to Lystra, then Iconium and then to Antioch, strengthening the disciples and appointing elders. After Antioch they travelled to Perga.

PERGA (14:25) Preached the Truth here. *This reference makes it appear that Paul did not preach here before, but journeyed on to Antioch because of his illness - "thorn in the flesh" (cp. Gal. 4:13). From here travelled to Attalia.*

ATTALIA (14:25-26) From here they sailed to Syrian Antioch.

SYRIAN ANTIOCH (14:26-28) Paul and Barnabas told the Ecclesia about their travels and the many converts God had given them.