

The Good News of the Kingdom

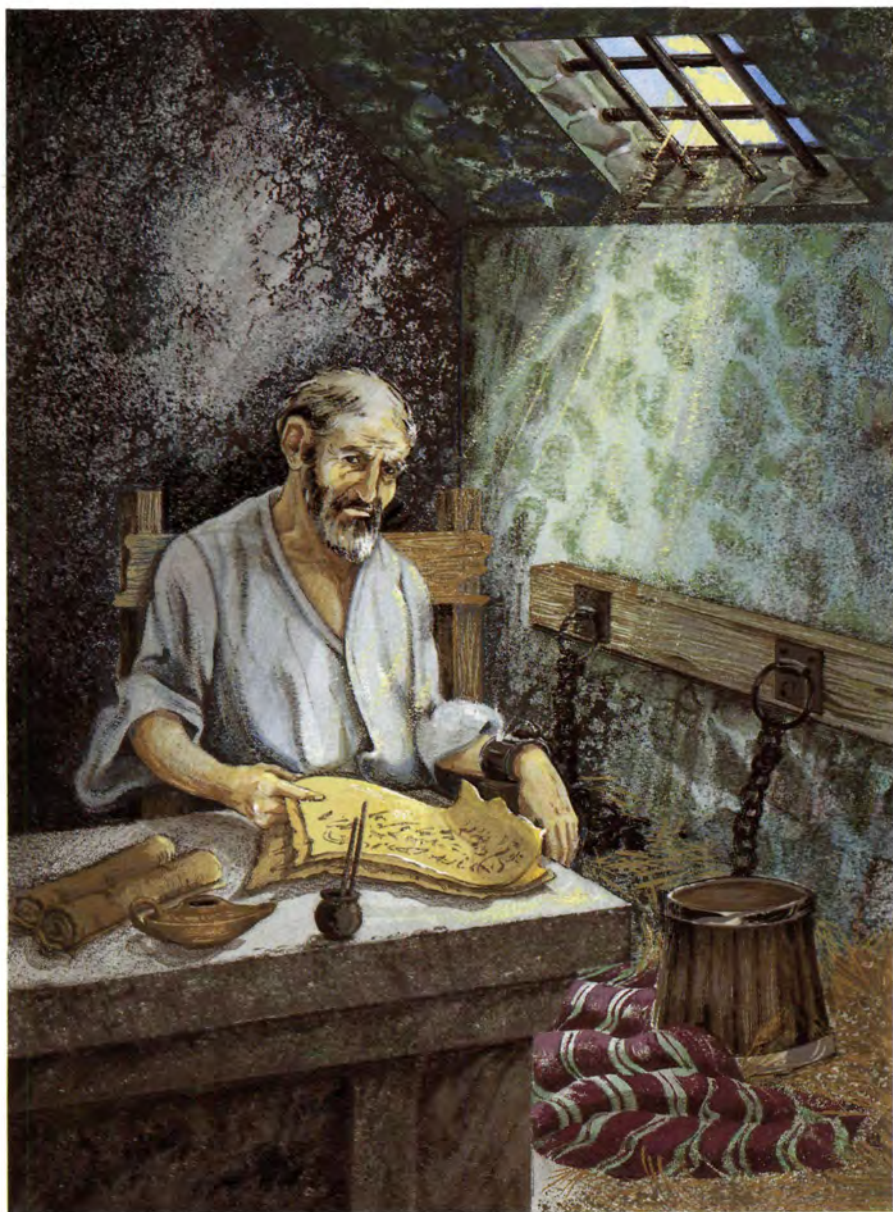


INTERMEDIATE NOTES — 13 to 14 Years

STAGE FIVE OF FIVE STAGES

CHRISTADELPHIAN SUNDAY SCHOOL ASSOCIATION
P.O. BOX 20, MODBURY NORTH 5092, SOUTH AUSTRALIA

THE APOSTLE PAUL IN PRISON



"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing"

—2nd Tim. 4:7-8

INTERMEDIATE NOTES - STAGE 5

PREFACE

We are pleased to issue a new set of Intermediate Notes to the theme "The Good News of the Kingdom". These notes have undergone an extensive review and we are confident you will find them both helpful and relevant for the needs of young people.

The goal has been to provide good spiritual education for younger teenagers and to ensure they can appreciate the lessons in their lives. The lessons may appear to be lengthy - this is due to including the verses in the text to enhance the readability and to encourage scholars to focus on the Scriptural passages. The Notes are written in a readable format so that the scholars can grasp the issues with many interesting charts etc.

Teachers should not feel constrained to cover a full lesson each week and may need to spread out the work a little in exploring the full scope of the lessons. Use of Bible marking for Homework is also encouraged. Family Bible Study sheets are available from the CSSA.

You will notice that each lesson has a standard format:-

Objective: This points out the key issues in the lesson.

Background: The brief background links the lesson with the previous lesson.

Principle for Living: Rather than presenting a wide range of lessons for us, each lesson concentrates on one key lesson. This does not mean that other lessons for us are not important, but there is one key principle explained fully.

Basic Bible Teaching: The intermediate years are an important time for young people to grasp the doctrines of the Truth. Over the 25 lessons many of the key doctrines are covered.

Verses to Remember: Not every lesson has a verse to remember but the notes encourage young people to commit to memory Bible verses.

Further Reading: These will be useful to scholars, parents and teachers.

Digging Deeper: This section if included is there to encourage further Bible research and will be useful to teachers who have classes with scholars who need their minds extended in Bible discovery. This may also encourage family Bible study. This section is not examinable and does not have to be taught in class.

A Further Look At: This section extends a previous idea. Again it is not examinable and does not need to be taught.

The committee would appreciate feedback from Sunday School Superintendents, teachers, parents and scholars on the new format and level of these notes, as well as any corrections.

May Yahweh's blessing and guidance continue to be with His children and servants who listen carefully to His Word.

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CHRONOLOGY OF ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

	AD			AD	
Emperor Tiberius	30	Crucifixion & Resurrection Pentecost - Acts 2	Emperor Claudius	51	Paul embarks on 2nd Journey Syria and Cilicia - Acts 15:41
	31	Healing of Lame Man - Acts 3 Ecclesia grows despite opposition - Acts 4 & 5		52	Lycaonia - Acts 16:1-5 Galatia - Acts 16:6 Macedonia - Acts 16:11.17:14
	32	Witness & Martyrdom of Stephen - Acts 6 & 7		53	Athens - Acts 17:15-34 18 months in Corinth - Acts 18:1-17
	33	Truth spreads to Sarnaria and an Ethiopian - Acts 8		54	Return to Jerusalem then Antioch - Acts 18:18-22
	34			55	Paul embarks on 3rd Journey Galatia & Phrygia - Acts 18:23
	35	Conversion of Paul - Acts 9		56	3 years in Ephesus - Acts 19
	36	Retirement of Paul into Arabia - Gal 1:15-18		57	
	37			58	Macedonia & Greece - Acts 20:1-5 Return to Jerusalem - Acts 20:6-21:18
	38	Paul's first visit to Jerusalem and return to Tarsus - Acts 9:26-30		59	Arrest at Jerusalem - Acts 21:27-34 Address to the Jews - Acts 22 Before the Sanhedrin - Acts 23:1-10
	39			60	Sent to Caesarea - Acts 23:11-35 Hearing before Felix - Acts 24
Emperor Caligula	40		Emperor Nero	61	2 years at Caesarea Hearing before Festus & Agrippa - Acts 25 & 26
	41			62	Paul's Journey to Rome - Acts 27 & 28 2 years in a hired house at Rome - Acts 28:30-31
	42	Truth spreads to Antioch - Acts 11:19-21		63	Trial & Acquittal
	43	Barnabas sent to Antioch - Acts 11:22-24		64	
Emperor Claudius	44	Barnabas brings Paul to Antioch- Acts 11:25-26	65		
	45	Famine relief taken by Barnabas and Paul to Jerusalem - Acts 11:27-30 James executed ; Peter imprisoned and released - Acts 12	66		
	46	Paul embarks on 1st Journey to Cyprus, Galatia and Lycaonia - Acts 13 & 14	67	Imprisoned at Rome - 2 Tim 4 2nd trial and execution	
	47		68		
	48		69		
	49	Return to Antioch - Acts 14:26-28	70	Fall of Jerusalem	
	50	Conference at Jerusalem - Acts 15			

1. THE APOSTLES - WITNESSES FOR CHRIST

“... this same Jesus shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven” Acts 1:11

READING: Acts 1

OBJECTIVE

The apostles were given the responsibility to continue the work of Jesus Christ on earth after he ascended into heaven. This lesson explains Christ's final instructions and commission to his disciples which was followed by his ascension into heaven. It shows the importance of the teaching of the resurrection. The lesson concludes with the apostles being established for the work ahead.

BACKGROUND

When Jesus had been crucified all his disciples had fled in despair. Three days later he had arisen from the dead, the Lord of life - alive for ever more. He showed himself to over 500 hundred of his followers and convinced them all that he was indeed Christ risen from the dead. He then gave his apostles instruction and comfort for the work ahead.

FORTY DAYS INSTRUCTION (1:1-5)

Over the next 40 days he gave *“commandment unto the apostles”* (Acts 1:2), *“opening their understanding”* (Luke 24:45) and explaining to them more fully the way they should follow him. This was essential since they were to be the leaders of Christ's ecclesia. None of us can do God's work unless we have learned the principles of God's Word. He was able to give them signs that he was indeed the Christ. The phrase 'infallible proofs' means a sure sign or positive proof. This included his appearance to Thomas when he showed him his hands and his feet.

Jesus Christ also spoke to his apostles “of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3), so that they would have a vision of the kingdom ahead. Christ commanded them to remain in Jerusalem until they received the Holy Spirit to help them in their work (Luke 24:49, Acts 1:4).

WITNESSES FOR CHRIST (1:6-8)

Finally the day came for Jesus Christ to ascend to his Father's right hand. As Christ led them out to the Mount of Olives, his disciples asked him, "*Lord wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?*" (Acts 1:6). They believed that Christ would restore the kingdom of God that existed in the past and reign from the throne of David in Jerusalem. They hoped this would happen immediately. Christ told them that the "times" (period) and "seasons" (specific date) were known only to the Father, not to him (his Father was still greater than him). In view of the great work ahead the apostles were to receive the Holy Spirit to help them to be witnesses for Christ. Their work would expand into all parts of the earth. They would be witnesses in:

- *Jerusalem* (as seen in Acts 2 to 7)
- *Judaea* (Acts 8, 9:32-43)
- *Samaria* (Acts 8)
- *the uttermost parts of the earth* (Acts 13 to 28)

You can see that the mission that Christ gave them is also the structure of the book of Acts, which records this great work of witnessing. They were so enthusiastic about the gospel that they followed Christ's instruction and took his teaching of the coming kingdom first to Jerusalem, then to Samaria and then to all nations.

PRINCIPLE FOR LIVING - *WITNESSES FOR CHRIST*

Once you are baptised you will be a bearer of God's name, to show or manifest the character of God to others. This is the practical meaning of a basic doctrine of the Bible: God manifestation. If we are truly full of the light of God's word we will shine forth His ways (Matthew 5) just as Jesus was the full manifestation of His Father (John 1:14). Before we are baptised, we need to resist the pressure to conform to this age and be honest with those at school or work about what we believe and why we cannot conform to their way of life. Before you are baptised get into good habits; learn to give an answer to all about you of what your parents have taught you is right and wrong.

THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST (1:9-11)

As Jesus Christ blessed his apostles (Luke 24:51) he was lifted up from them until a cloud surrounded him and he was taken from

their sight. The amazement of the apostles is captured by Luke's description "*they looked steadfastly into heaven*". They gazed into heaven as Christ's work amongst them came to a sudden end. At that point two angels appeared to them to give them and us a wonderful promise. It is important that you learn verse 11 off by heart because it teaches an important Bible teaching - Jesus Christ will return to the earth:

- bodily ("*this same Jesus*")
- visibly ("*as ye have seen him go*")
- to the Mount of Olives (Zech 14:3).

The message of the angels is a message of hope for all believers from that time to ours - Jesus Christ is coming back. We have the special hope because we believe that it will be very soon (see Lesson 25).



BASIC BIBLE TEACHING - *CHRIST WILL RETURN*

The New Testament has literally hundreds of references to the return of Christ. This is a basic teaching of the Bible because without his return the purpose of God cannot be completed. He will initially return to bring judgment as the little stone power of Daniel 2; then he will reign as prince of peace (Isaiah 9:6). The return of Christ becomes one of the frequent teachings of the apostles in the book of Acts (e.g. 2:35, 3:19-21; 17:31). It is also frequently found in the writings of the apostles (1 Thes.4:14-17; 5:1-4; 2 Tim.4:8; 1 Cor.15:23).

WAITING IN JERUSALEM (1:12-26)

They returned from the Mount of Olives with great joy (Luke 24:52) to wait for God's gift of the Holy Spirit. The apostles gathered for prayer with the women and Mary and Jesus' brethren in the upper room (vv.13-14). There was a wonderful unity among them, they "all continued with one accord" (verse 14); an idea which occurs again in Ch.2:1. At this time, Peter stood up in their midst. In less than two months since he had denied his Lord he had grown in spiritual maturity to lead the ecclesia. He suggested to the 120 brethren and sisters present that they fill the position of the twelfth apostle. As there were twelve tribes, Jesus had originally chosen that number of apostles to instruct Israel. The twelve were promised a special place in his kingdom (Matt.19:28-30). How appropriate it would be to keep that number. He reminded them of the dreadful death of Judas and how it was prophesied that he would die (Psalm 69:25-28) and need to be replaced (Psalm 109:2-8). Peter gave them the qualifications of an apostle. They needed a man who had been with Jesus throughout his ministry and seen the risen Christ. They chose two men who met these qualifications, Barsabbus and Matthias. They then committed the matter to God in prayer and cast lots; the lot fell on Matthias.

THE QUALIFICATIONS OF AN APOSTLE

We can add to the list in Acts chapter 1 to come up with a full list of the requirements of an apostle:

- He must have been with Jesus from his baptism to his ascension, and seen him raised from the dead (Acts 1:8, 21, 22).
- He must have seen Christ and talked with him (1 Cor 9:1).
- He must have been chosen and sent of Christ (John 15:16).
- He had the Holy Spirit by which he could do miracles as proof of his apostleship (Acts 19:11, 2 Cor.2:12, Gal.2:8)
- He believed the true gospel and walked according to it (Gal 1:8; 2:14).

SUMMARY AND LESSONS FOR US

- ☞ Christ spent forty days teaching his apostles and preparing them for the great work ahead.
- ☞ The apostles would be supported by the Holy Spirit. In these last days we do not have the Holy Spirit but we also have the promise that God is with us if we trust in Him.
- ☞ The apostles were hoping that the restoration of the kingdom of Israel would be immediate. Christ told them that no man knew when that would happen. Then Christ was taken up into heaven. We know that Christ will come and be united for ever with those who have looked earnestly for him.
- ☞ Following the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ, the apostles gathered in the upper room to pray. At this time Peter explained to them the need to replace Judas; and faithful Matthias joined the twelve.

VERSE TO REMEMBER Acts 1:11

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS

1. *How did the Lord Jesus Christ occupy the 40 days after the resurrection?*
2. *At the time of Christ's ascension, what were the apostles wanting to happen immediately?*
3. *Note 5 passages (in addition to those on p. 8) that speak of the second coming of Christ.*
4. *What lessons are found for us in Christ's 40 days work with his apostles?*

ESSAY QUESTION

1. *Describe the ascension of Christ and its importance to us.*
2. *Explain the basic Bible teachings contained in Acts chapter 1. (Include in your answer the restoration of the kingdom of Israel and the second coming of Christ.)*

2. THE DAY OF PENTECOST

“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ” Acts 2:39

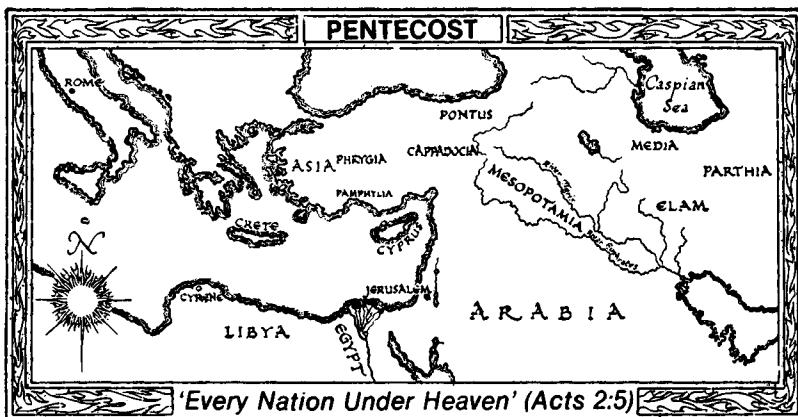
READING: Acts 2

OBJECTIVE

This lesson shows how the Holy Spirit was given and how it helped the apostles' in their witness to the risen Christ. You will come to understand the wonderful speech of Peter by which many were convinced that they ought to change their lives. We need to recognise that God's requirements have not changed - "Repent and be baptized".

BACKGROUND

Jesus Christ had told his disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit to come upon them. They did not wait long. Only ten days after Christ's resurrection the Holy Spirit came upon them to the amazement of the throngs that gathered for the feast of Pentecost. There were people in Jerusalem from many areas in the Roman world. With the visitors gathered in Jerusalem there may have well been a million people present. They were by God's providence able to hear and accept the message of salvation, and take it home with them.



POWER FROM ON HIGH (2:1-13)

The day of Pentecost or Feast of weeks, held in the autumn time, was a time when Israel celebrated God's blessings in the crops and His greater mercy in deliverance from Egypt (Deut.16:9-12). They counted fifty days from the offering of the sheaf of the firstfruits and then offered two wave loaves with the other offerings (Lev.23:9-21). These represented Jew and Gentile who would be the firstfruits after "Christ the firstfruits." This special feast of Pentecost (Acts 2:1) revealed what the Law of Moses taught (the idea of the phrase "fully come" is "to be fulfilled"). The invitation would go out, through which more firstfruits of both Jews and Gentiles would be developed ready for the kingdom through the work of Christ.

The feeling of unity amongst the believers was seen on this day, as they were "**all with one accord in one place**" (verse 1). Suddenly, a noise from heaven like a violent blast filled the house. Tongues like as of fire were "distributed and resting upon them" (RSV). They were able to speak in a variety of languages as the Spirit allowed them. How amazed they all must have felt to have a special portion of God's spirit. The multitudes from all parts gathered with amazement to hear these Galileans speak in the languages of their own various countries. They were all amazed and in doubt ("utterly at a loss" Rotherham) and said, "What meaneth this?" Some accused them of being drunk with new wine.

"WHAT MEANETH THIS?" vv.14-21

Peter now stood up to give the people an answer. He was to unlock the door to the kingdom of God to the Jews (Matt.16:18-19). He addressed the local inhabitants ("men of Judaea" v.14) and the visitors for the feast ("those that dwell at Jerusalem", Rotherham 'sojourners'). He explained the great phenomena they were witnessing. The Spirit gifted brethren were not drunk, for it was only nine o'clock in the morning ("the third hour of the day"). What they were seeing was a fulfilment of Joel 2:28-32; the prophecy of the visions that would occur before 70 AD, 'the great and notable day of the Lord' (verse 20). On three generations would be given this special gift of the Holy Spirit. The destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70 would bring about the destruction of the Jewish heavens (verse 19). The Holy Spirit was promised by Christ as a

witness to the Jewish nation (John 16:7-11). There was hope for those who call on the name of the Lord (v.21), a hope that he elaborated later.

In summary then Peter was showing that:

- they were listening to the words of God (vv.17-18)
- judgment overshadowed their nation (vv.19-20)
- there was a hope of personal deliverance (v.21)

“WHOM GOD HATH RAISED UP” (2:22-28)

Then Peter commanded their attention “hear these words!” (v.22). There was a greater point that he wanted to tell them than the outpouring of the Spirit gifts. The gifts were a proof that Jesus Christ was now exalted at the right hand of God. So he comes to the crux of the situation. They had crucified Jesus, the despised Nazarene, a man whom God had approved by miracles that he did in their midst. Yet they had refused the evidence and had fulfilled God’s will by crucifying him (v.23).

PRINCIPLE FOR LIVING - *RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR ACTIONS*

In encouraging the Romans to crucify Christ they had fulfilled the “determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God” verse 23. Yet this did not make them any less responsible for their own actions; for he said “by **wicked** hands have crucified and slain”. They could not stand back and say, “It was the Romans that did it - not us!” Neither can we blame others for leading us astray, or justify doing the wrong thing because some good might seem to come out of it. God can use our evil to fulfil His will but this does not condone our behaviour. We need to face up to our responsibilities.

They had killed, but God had raised him up (v.23); because of his righteous life it was not possible that he should remain in the grave (Rom.1:4). He had triumphed over sin and death. To show that the resurrection was not unexpected, Peter now drew their attention to the Old Testament scriptures. He quoted from David’s words of Psalm 16:8-11. Of whom did David write that “I foresaw the Lord always before my face”? Who was this one who would be

raised soon after death so that his soul would not see corruption? Who was the person who would find pleasures at God's right hand (Psa.16:11)? Their Messiah had to be a resurrected man!

“SIT THOU ON MY RIGHT HAND UNTIL ...” (2:29-36)

Peter then spoke about their honoured patriarch David who wrote the Psalm. Despite his greatness, it could not be David himself that was referred to. They all knew where his sepulchre was (v.29) – and it contained David's bones. Peter cites the promise to David (2 Sam.7:12-16) as evidence to show that David understood that his seed “according to the flesh” would sit on his throne. David wrote Psalm 16 because he understood that his seed would die but not see corruption. His seed would be raised to eternal life. Hence his conclusion “this Jesus whom God hath raised up” is Messiah or Christ (vv.29-32).

Unlike David they could not show anyone the sepulchre of Jesus for it was an empty tomb - the evidence could not be ignored! Jesus must be the Messiah! The question remained - where was Jesus now? Peter cites Psalm 68:18 where it speaks of the time when Christ would ascend to heaven and receive gifts for men (verse 33). This was exactly what had happened on this day when the Holy Spirit was given. Further, Peter shows that David realised that the One who would ascend was not David but his Lord. In vv.34-35 he quotes from another prophecy of David (Psalm 110:1-2) where David prophesied that his Lord (Heb.adon 'lord' or 'ruler') would ascend to Yahweh's right hand until the time came to take the kingdom.

So who is Jesus? Peter comes to the only conclusion possible (v. 36). That same Jesus whom they had crucified was both:

- Lord (Psalm 110:1) as evidenced by his ascension, and
- Christ, the Messiah or Anointed (Psalm 2:2) as shown by his resurrection (Psalm 16).

His full title is the Lord Jesus Christ, a name which encompasses the work of God in him:

- **Lord** - the future king who will rule the whole world.
- **Jesus** - Yah shall save - Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.

- **Christ** - the Anointed. Set apart as God's only son as King and High Priest.

We should learn to recognise the importance of this name. The name Jesus is used carefully in the New Testament to speak of Jesus in his mortal days on earth. We should now learn to speak of him as the Lord Jesus Christ.

BASIC BIBLE TEACHING - *CHRIST RESURRECTED*

The doctrine of the resurrection is the basis of our hope. It is clearly taught by Paul as fundamental to our salvation in 1 Corinthians 15. He says that the resurrection of Jesus on the third day was "according to the scriptures" v.4 (Psalms 16 and 110 being two of them). Further, "if Christ is not risen then is our preaching vain and our faith is also vain" (v.14). But "now is Christ risen from the dead and become the firstfruits of them that slept" (v.20) The importance to us is emphasised by drawing attention to our sin stricken nature which will die. In Christ (by baptism) we can be made alive for evermore (vv.21-22). By living a resurrected life now, we can receive immortality at his coming (v.23).

"MEN AND BRETHREN, WHAT SHALL WE DO?" (2:37-40)

The absolute truth of what Peter had said struck many of those gathered with great force. They had been guilty of murdering the Son of God! They had refused to recognise the presence of their Messiah! What could they do? There was no offering under the Law or great act they could do to overcome what they had done.

They needed to do two things:

- Repent - to change their life.
- Be baptised - to identify with the Jesus whom they had crucified who was now Lord and Christ, and receive the forgiveness of sins.

The result would be that they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit as well. This promise (of the Holy Spirit v.33) was to them and the next generation ("their children") and to the Gentiles ("afar off"); even as many of them as God would call. In those last words Peter picks up again the words of Joel 2:32 that he had broken off

in the middle of in verse 21. God was offering salvation to them before the judgments on Jerusalem came. So Peter exhorted them, "Save yourselves from this untoward generation".

PRINCIPLE FOR LIVING - *REPENT*

As you grow older you will come to the point in life when you are ready to become a son or daughter of the living God. To become part of His family, God is looking for repentance. Repentance is not merely feeling sorry for past sins. The idea of the word repent is to change ourselves. Bullinger's Lexicon defines the word as "to change one's mind and purpose ... not merely to repent of, nor to forsake sin, but to change one's mind ... regarding it". To repent is to disown and put off the past life as a sinner in Adam and be willing to enter the new way of life and thinking under the constitution of righteousness. This step requires sober reflection and total conviction. When we have really repented we will be ready to be baptized.

"THEY THAT GLADLY RECEIVED HIS WORD" (2:41-47).

The response to Peter's message was immediate. With a sound knowledge of the scriptures, and the clear understanding that Jesus was the Messiah who had been offered for their sins they were ready to be baptized. Three thousand were baptised in one day. There was a wonderful spirit of unity amongst the believers. They continued steadfastly in:

- the apostle's doctrine – that the death and resurrection of Jesus had made it possible for all men to find salvation by faith in His name.
- fellowship - sharing together both the spiritual blessings and their physical possessions (v.45).
- breaking of bread - from house to house v.46
- prayers - praise (v.47) and constant supplication to God.

The result of their faithful response was the blessing of the Father. And so we come to one of the progress reports in the book of Acts: "the Lord added to the ecclesia daily such as should be saved". (Acts 2:47).

SUMMARY AND LESSONS FOR US

- ☞ The outpouring of the Holy Spirit gifts on the day of Pentecost created a great impression on the assembled multitudes in

Jerusalem. They heard despised Galileans speaking in the languages of all the lands from where they had come. "What meaneth this they asked". Peter stood up showing them that it was a fulfilment of the words of the prophet Joel. He went on to show them that the gifts of the Holy Spirit were a result of Christ's ascension.

- ☉ They had crucified Jesus but God had raised him from the dead in fulfilment of Psalm 16, and he had ascended to the right hand of God in fulfilment of Psalm 110. That same Jesus whom they had crucified had been made both Lord and Christ.
- ☉ The people were pierced through and Peter told them to "Repent and be baptized". Three thousand obeyed on that day with others following every day. They continued steadfastly in the teachings and practise of the living Christ.
- ☉ We today still have the opportunity to accept Peter's call, "Repent and be baptized" before the Lord Jesus Christ returns. We can live in a joyful state with our fellow believers until the Lord comes 'to make his foes his footstool'.

VERSE TO REMEMBER Acts 2:38 "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit".

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS

1. *Describe how the Holy Spirit was poured out.*
2. *What did Peter show by his quotation from the prophet Joel?*
3. *What is the meaning of the name the Lord Jesus Christ? Which Old Testament scriptures pointed forward to these terms?*
4. *What was the response to Peter's speech?*

ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. *Briefly outline the key features of Peter's speech on the day of Pentecost.*
2. *Show how the basic principles of:*
 - *responsibility for our actions*
 - *Christ's resurrection*
 - *repentance**should influence our lives today.*

3. PETER HEALS THE LAME MAN

“in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk”

READING: Acts 3

OBJECTIVE

To show how the apostles performed great miracles by the power of God to show men and women the greatness of Jesus Christ who had given them this power. We also learn what we must do to be saved.

BACKGROUND

There were many people baptized on the day of Pentecost and the new ecclesia rejoiced in the salvation in Christ. They had no meeting halls. Memorial meetings were held in their homes and they often went into the temple to worship and pray.

A MAN IN NEED (verses 1 to 6)

Peter and John were making their way into the temple to pray at the ninth hour (3 p.m.) They came to the massive gate called the Beautiful Gate, approximately 25 metres high and 20 metres wide. It was made of Corinthian brass covered with plates of gold and silver. Alongside this Beautiful Gate was a poor lame man begging for alms. There are two important things about this man. He was:

- incurable – *“lame from this mother’s womb”* (v.2)
- well known, being laid there *“daily”* (v.2).

This man asked for money from Peter and John. Peter fastened his eyes on him and said, “look on us”. Instead of receiving money he heard the words: *“Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk”* (v.6).

The Law and Temple of the Jews could not heal him or provide for his needs, but Peter could provide the true riches: *“Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things as silver and gold ... but with the precious blood of Christ”* (1 Pet.1:18-19).

AN AMAZING MIRACLE (verses 7 to 11)

Peter then took the man by the right hand and lifted him up. Those feeble bones were now full of strength and he went walking and leaping and praising God. He went into the Temple with Peter and John. Attention was drawn to the wonderful work of Christ “Then shall the lame man leap as an hart” (Isa.35:6). The crowd was amazed to see this well known figure who had never walked leaping around. They all ran together into Solomon’s Porch to listen to Peter and John.

PRINCIPLE FOR LIVING - *THANK GOD ALWAYS*

The immediate response of the lame man was to thank God. Psalm 146:8 speaks of how Yahweh raiseth them that are bowed down. The Psalm starts and ends with a call to “Praise ye Yah” (Hallelujah). As we see God’s grace to us the response should be to praise Him and thank our Father for His great goodness. Yahweh’s greatest act of kindness was to provide His son and invite us to be sharers of the salvation He has provided. At times we can treat these blessings casually and seek after fun and excitement in the world around us. But Paul taught the brethren and sisters at Jerusalem that true joy comes from a knowledge of this provision of God. “By him (Christ)” we can “offer the sacrifice of praise continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name” (Heb.13:15). (see also Col.3:17; 1 Thes.5:18 and Psalm 18:48-50).

PETER’S SECOND SPEECH

The people in the Temple had just witnessed a remarkable act of healing where a man was transformed from an “incurable” cripple to full health. There were things that had to be said if the people were to understand the power of the risen Christ to transform their lives for God. The incident caused no small stir and Peter now used the opportunity to best advantage and drawing the people to the area called Solomon’s Porch, he began to address them all.

Peter’s address followed in these steps:

1. THE CRIME OF THE CROSS (verses 12-16).

- a) Two things were necessary for miracles to happen - power and holiness – and these did not come from the apostles themselves.

But the glorified Christ did show such power and holiness. Peter and John were his servants in this miracle (v.12).

- b) The Jews' own behaviour had gone against the purpose of God. God had acted in harmony with His promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He had provided a "servant" (the word 'son' in this verse is really the Greek word for 'servant') and had glorified him, but the Jews had denied Jesus and delivered him to death (v.13).
- c) These men had not been able to recognise holiness even when a holy one, Jesus, stood in front of them. Jesus was a person who harmed no one and went about always doing good. Even Pilate wanted to release him because he "found no fault in him". Their terrible crime was that they had rejected one, both "holy" (i.e. pure and separate) and "just" (i.e. upholding what is right). When they were given a choice, they saved the life of a murderer (v.14), and killed the Prince of Life.
- d) God had rejected their assessment of Christ, the Prince of Life by raising him from the dead. And Peter added, "we are witnesses" (v. 15).
- e) It was not by the apostles' power the lame man had been healed. The apostles were the channel of that power, not its source. The Source was Christ whose "Name" (i.e. his character and the things he stood for) "through faith in his name" had been responsible for the miracle. Without that, they would remain as helpless as the lame man was before he was healed (v.16).

2. KNOWLEDGE AND RESPONSIBILITY (verses 17-26).

After Peter had reminded his listeners of the terrible crime they had committed in crucifying Jesus, he appealed to them to become wholehearted in believing in the glorified Christ. His reasoning went as follows:

a) Knowledge creates responsibility.

The Jews put Jesus to death while they were ignorant of God's plan. Now they understood that God had foretold that Christ would suffer and that Jesus' death was fulfilment of prophecy. Consequently their ignorance was removed and they stood in a responsible position before God. To receive and understand the knowledge of Yahweh's will is a great privilege, but it carries an equal weight of responsibility.

b) The Obligations of Knowledge.

The people gathered there had responsibilities because of the truth they had learnt. They must "*repent and be converted*" (v.19).

'Repent' means "change of mind", (reverse your thinking to the things of God). "Be converted" means to "turn about" i.e., to walk in another direction. Therefore the obligations of knowledge are (1) to embrace it sincerely and (2) let it influence daily conduct.

c) The Benefits of Repentance (verse 19).

The benefits are twofold:

- (1) Past sins are "blotted out" or wiped away, and
- (2) "Times of refreshing shall come" i.e., both now and in the future.

We shall receive strength to continue in our walk to the Kingdom and if found worthy will receive the greatest "refreshing" in being made immortal in the Kingdom age.

d) An End to Human Suffering (verse 20).

Christ's second coming will refresh this earth at God's appointed time (see Psa.72; Isa.35).

e) The Scriptures must be fulfilled (verse 21).

All the things that happened to Jesus, his sufferings, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, had been as the scriptures required (e.g., Psa.16; 1 10). His return to restore all things would also be in fulfilment of prophecy (e.g., Jer.23:5-8; Amos 9:11, 12).

f) The Special Privileges of God's People (verses 22-24).

Moses told Israel that God would raise up a prophet from their midst and that it would be their responsibility to hear him on pain of death (Deut.18:18-19). The same message had been repeated since the times of Samuel and the "schools of the prophets". The Jews were the children of the prophets whose fathers were bound in covenant to God. They had received a promise which carried with it the universal blessings for all mankind (cp.Gen.12:3;18:18;22:18; Gal. 3:8). In a very special sense they were God's chosen people. The great blessing was that sins could be forgiven.

g) Special Privilege brings Special Duty.

Finally, Peter showed the obvious truth that special privilege brings special responsibility. One cannot know what to do and then do what one likes. The opportunity was given "to the Jews

first” (Rom.1:16) to obey God’s will. They were to reflect God’s goodness to the world. That goodness must be seen in them, first, in a life that turns away from sin.

BASIC BIBLE TEACHING - *FORGIVENESS OF SINS IN THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT*

This remarkable chapter ends with the great blessing in the promises made to the fathers. When Yahweh promised to Abraham that in his seed all nations would be blessed there is a very specific blessing given. The blessing is that sins could be forgiven in the Lord Jesus Christ, so that people could inherit the promises. Sinners will not enter the kingdom. In Galatians 3, Paul draws attention to God’s intention to “justify (forgive) the heathen (nations)” (verse 8). This could only be done through their faith or belief in God. This great blessing which is to come upon all nations at the return of Jesus Christ is available today, to all people who believe and are baptised into Jesus Christ (Acts 3:26-29).

SUMMARY AND LESSONS FOR US:

- Israel was like the lame man – unable to save themselves without the intervention of the power of Jesus Christ. We are in a similar position.
- Peter warned his listeners of the crime of the cross. His address gave a guilty nation hope through repentance, but it also showed that with knowledge comes a responsibility to the things of God.
- The Jews needed to clearly understand their responsibility and show their preparedness for Christ’s return by a wholehearted belief and obedience to the Truth.
- The lessons of Peter’s speech are still of value today. Knowledge brings responsibility. What we know in theory must be seen in practice, that is, we must “practice what we preach”. It is not enough to be brought up in the Truth or to know that the Truth in a theoretical way - we must allow that knowledge to influence our thinking and our actions.
- Jesus, at God’s right hand, observes all. He will soon return at the time appointed for the judgment of his people. Peter’s address shows how that although our lives (outside of Christ) are without hope of salvation, yet through repentance and submission to God’s will, we can have hope and life, now and in the age to come.

VERSE TO REMEMBER Acts 3:26 “Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities”

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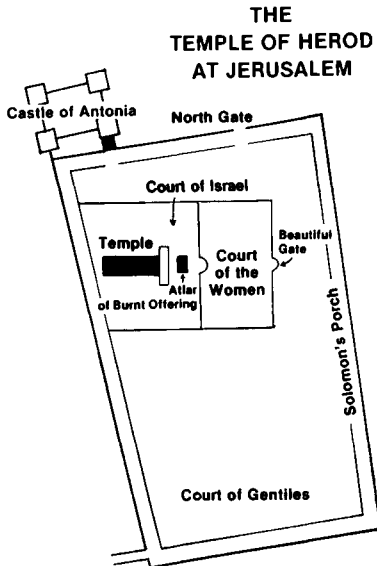
“Story of the Bible” (H.P.Mansfield) Vol.13, pp.23-27.

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS

1. *What did Peter and John give the lame man at the Beautiful Gate?*
2. *What was the terrible crime the Jews were guilty of?*
3. *Show from Peter’s speech how knowledge brings responsibility.*
4. *What is the great blessing of the Abrahamic promise?*
5. *Why should we thank God always?*

ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. *Tell the story of the incident when Peter healed the lame man at the Beautiful Gate.*
2. *Briefly outline Peter’s speech after healing the lame man at the Beautiful Gate, showing the main points relating to:*
 - *the crime of the cross*
 - *how knowledge brings responsibility.*



4. THE APOSTLES ON TRIAL BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

“We cannot but speak the things we have seen and heard”

READING: Acts 4

OBJECTIVE

The apostles bold witnessing before the religious leaders of their day shows us how we should speak confidently of the things we believe.

BACKGROUND

As Peter and John stood in the temple explaining how they had healed the lame man in the name of Jesus Christ they were interrupted. The religious authorities took them into prison. The next day they were to stand before the authorities and witness for their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

THE ARREST (verses 1 - 4)

Peter had taught the people with authority, preaching *“through Jesus the resurrection from the dead”* (verse 2). He was using the resurrection of Christ to prove that all could be raised from the dead. This disturbed the priests and Sadducees because they did not believe in the resurrection at all (Acts 23:8). In addition their authority was at stake; they thought they had got rid of Jesus but now his apostles were continuing his teaching. The temple guard seized Peter, John and the “lame” man, and they were put in ward until the next day. However, the opposition could not stop the effect; the number of believers grew to 5,000, a further 2,000 being baptised this day.

THE TRIAL (verses 5 - 22)

The next day the Sanhedrin gathered to hear the case. The Sanhedrin or council was a group of seventy men given limited jurisdiction by Rome. It was composed of the priestly family and the most ‘intellectual’ scribes, but this did not overawe Peter and John. Their first question was, “By what power, or by what name,

have ye done this?" This was similar to a question they had put to Jesus just weeks earlier (Matt.21:23-27) concerning his authority. This question had been answered in Peter's speech of chapter 3; the authority was that by his resurrection Jesus was now both "Lord" and "Christ".

Peter filled with the Holy Spirit spoke boldly. Why had they been put on trial for a good deed? Both the Sanhedrin and the whole nation should realise that the despised man whom they had crucified was now raised from the dead. Through Christ this man had been made whole (Gk. "saved"). He took them to Psalm 118:22. Jesus was the despised stone who had been made the head of the corner. They would remember how Jesus had used this same passage before they had crucified him (Matthew 21:42). However while Jesus had quoted it, Peter draws out the meaning. They, the leaders of the nation, were the ones who had cast aside the stone which God had provided; but God had elevated him. He was now the means through whom God was offering salvation; "*there is none other name among men whereby we must be saved*". Note that the word 'saved' is the same Greek word as in verse 9 "made whole". The healing of the lame man was proof that through Jesus Christ salvation could come from eternal death.

The Sanhedrin marvelled at Peter and John (just as the Psalm had said, "It is marvellous in our eyes"). They were amazed that these men who were unlearned (not tutored by the rabbis) and ignorant (laymen, not religious men) could speak with such boldness. Further to their problems, the presence of the healed lame man silenced any attempt they might make to reject the miracle.

Having sent the three out of the Sanhedrin they discussed what should be done. Surely a notable miracle (Diaglott 'signal sign') had been done and could not be denied; the people glorified God for what was done (verse 21). The only option they believed was to try and suppress the teaching in the name of Jesus Christ. Peter and John like Daniel of old spoke boldly to their judges. Surely they the judges of Israel knew whether it was right to hearken unto man more than God. Peter and John would not stop witnessing: "*We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard*" (verse 20). All the leaders of the nation could do was threaten them and let them go. How strong are we in witnessing to the world the truth we believe; for "*if we deny him he shall also deny us*" (2 Timothy 2:12). If we confess him, he (Christ) will confess (acknowledge) us before God (Matt.10:32).

THEIR GLAD RETURN TO THEIR BRETHREN (verses 23 - 30)

Peter and John (and probably the healed man) returned to the company of believers and told them all that happened. They broke into a united prayer of thanksgiving for the salvation God had provided.

PRINCIPLE FOR LIVING - *THANKSGIVING AND PRAYER FOR HELP*

There was great rejoicing when Peter and John were released. They joined together in a wonderful prayer of praise and seeking God's continued blessing. How often do we thank God for special blessings He has given to us and our families and friends, and ask Him to continue to be with us. There are certain things we cannot pray for before we are baptised as we have no mediator. However all can learn to praise God and thank Him for all His goodness, and seek His help. Note also that when they prayed it was in the terms and phrases of scripture. As our minds become in tune with the word of God we will learn to freely draw from the scriptures feelings and ideas for our prayers.

In their prayer they:

- Acknowledged Yahweh as the sovereign who has made everything, and is in control of all things, including their situation (Psalm 146:4-9).
- Cited the words of David from Psalm 2 which show that the rulers of the earth would stand in vain against Yahweh's Anointed.
- Showed that these words were fulfilled – Herod, Pilate, Gentiles and Jews had gathered against Jesus.
- Showed that the same powers were gathering against them, God's servants.
- Pleaded that God's strength may be with them to enable them to preach with power to do signs and wonders by the name of His Holy Son Jesus.

They were being subjected to great opposition as bearers of the name of Christ; and asked God to be with them to grant them boldness to speak and signs to confirm their witness. The response from God was immediate - the place was shaken.

BASIC BIBLE TEACHING: *THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST*

The idea of a name in the Bible represents:

- character (for example, Nabal's name means fool and that's what he was)
- purpose (for example, Methusaleh's name pointed forward to God's purpose in the flood).

God's covenant name (Yahweh) is used of His purpose – "He who will be" and of His character as declared in Exodus 34:6-7.

The name of the Lord Jesus Christ clearly involves His purpose:

- **Lord** – the coming ruler of the world (Psa.110:1)
- **Jesus** – *Yah shall save*. For He would be God's salvation (Isa.7:14, Matt.1:
- **Christ** – He was *Anointed* as the Son of God with immortality.

When the apostles called on the name of Jesus Christ they were calling upon their Lord who was all of these things. He was the Saviour who will be King of Kings and therefore it was important to make all people know that it was in Christ's name that they performed such miracles.

SUMMARY AND LESSONS FOR US

- ☞ The rulers put the apostles in prison while they decided what to do to stop these men who were causing them such concern. Their problem was that the lame man was now walking around and no one could deny it.
- ☞ The apostles fearlessly testified before the rulers of Jerusalem, by what means the lame man had been made whole: "*By the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth!*"
- ☞ Like the apostles we should boldly teach the gospel of the kingdom and the name of Jesus Christ.
- ☞ The ecclesia prayed for the release of Peter and John and praised Yahweh when He intervened. God will always listen to our cry if we truly seek Him.

VERSE TO REMEMBER: "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (verse 20)

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS

1. *By what power or name had the apostles performed the miracle?*
2. *In what way did Peter condemn the leaders of the nation in the course of his defence in vv.8 to 12?*
3. *Why did the Sanhedrin decide not to punish them?*
4. *Briefly outline the prayer made by the company of believers after the apostles release?*

ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. *Recount the story of the trial of Peter and John after the healing of the lame man.*

A FURTHER LOOK AT - Facts about the book of Acts

Acts records the progress of the Gospel. In searching for a way to analyse the book it should be noticed that Jesus gave a specific command to his apostles: "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in JERUSALEM, and in all JUDEA, and in SAMARIA, and unto the UTTERMOST PART OF THE EARTH" (1:8). The spread of the gospel followed precisely the blueprint given by the Lord; first we read about the gospel being propounded in JERUSALEM by the apostles (Chaps. 2-7); then we read of the spread of the disciples to JUDEA and of Philip's work in SAMARIA (Chap. 8); this is followed by the conversion of Paul (Chap. 9) and the formal inclusion of the Gentiles into the hope of Israel - the conversion of the Roman centurion, Cornelius (Chap. 10). These last two events played an important part in the spread of the gospel into the "UTTERMOST PART OF THE EARTH". Chapters 13 to 28 deal principally with Paul's three missionary journeys and his journey to Rome as a prisoner in bonds.

As the book of Acts records the spread of the Gospel it gives "progress reports" which show the success of the preaching work in each of its phases:

- 2:47 "And the Lord ADDED TO THE ECCLESIA DAILY such as should be saved"
- 4:4 "Howbeit MANY OF THEM which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand"
- 5:14 "And believers were the MORE ADDED to the Lord, MULTITUDES both of men and women"
- 6:7 "And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples MULTIPLIED IN JERUSALEM greatly . . ."
- 9:31 "Then had the ecclesias rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria and were edified; and ... WERE MULTIPLIED"
- 11:24 "And MUCH PEOPLE was added unto the Lord"
- 12:24 "But the word of God GREW AND MULTIPLIED"
- 16:5 "And so were the ecclesias established in the faith, and INCREASED IN NUMBER DAILY"
- 19:20 "So MIGHTILY GREW THE WORD OF GOD and prevailed"

5. OBEYING GOD RATHER THAN MEN

“We ought to obey God rather than men”

READING: Acts 5

OBJECTIVE:

In this lesson we will see how God handled the first case of deliberate sin in the first century ecclesia. Contrasted with the deceitful attitude of Ananias and Sapphira we see the faith and enthusiasm of the apostles. They were willing to preach even in the face of severe opposition. They were tried by the authorities but allowed to go free because of their sincere belief that they must obey God before men.

BACKGROUND

The early days in the first century ecclesia were exciting. As we saw in the last lesson, many thousands were convinced by the message of the apostles. These people gladly repented and were baptised. However they watched the apostles suffer for what they believed. This caused a wonderful spirit of unity in the ecclesia; they even shared possessions amongst each other. Some like Barnabas even sold land to provide money for those in need (4:32-37).

LYING TO GOD (vv.1-4)

Human nature doesn't change; there will always be those who want the praise of men. This led to the unfortunate incident involving Ananias and Sapphira. They wanted to be praised for providing money for the needy - but they did not want to give too much! So after they had sold some land Ananias brought an amount of money to the apostles, saying that they had sold their land for that price.

“With his wife’s knowledge he kept some of the proceeds, and brought only a part, and laid it at the apostles’ feet” (v.2, RSV). Peter strongly rebuked them. This was hypocrisy! They did not have to sell the property or give all the money from the sale. They did not have to give any money! But to say one thing and do another was lying to God. “Why hath Satan filled thine heart?” Peter asked. “Satan”

means “adversary” and he was obviously not some supernatural monster. The Satan was their deceitful desires that had been an adversary to the truth. Ananias and Sapphira were to blame (verses 4, 8 and 9): “why hast **thou** conceived this thing in **thine** heart? **Thou** hast lied unto God”.

PUNISHMENT (vv.5-11)

Imagine how Ananias felt - foolish and very ashamed. Why had he thought he could do this? He knew the apostles had God’s spirit and that God himself sees and knows everything. Do we always remember this? But the matter could not end there. This was the first recorded sin in the early ecclesia; it had to be strongly punished. The other brethren and sisters needed to be shown that they would not receive praise or commendation for lying to God. He immediately fell down dead. And so did his wife Sapphira three hours later when she continued the deception about the money they gave. They were buried next to each other - a pair united in sin shared a sudden sad death. “And great fear came upon all the ecclesia”.

We should also fear when we think about the all-seeing and all-knowing power of our Heavenly Father. We may be able to deceive those around us but we can never deceive God. He knows our hearts and motives. If we remember this we will speak the truth and not be tempted to do the wrong thing just to impress others. James 1:13-15 shows us the process of sin which we see clearly in the story of Ananias and Sapphira. Lust - or wrong desires - led to sin, which led to immediate death. However, faithful humble service leads to a full and happy life now, and life forever in the age to come.

SIGNS AND WONDERS - ARREST! (vv.12-18)

In verses 12-14 we have a “progress report” of the ecclesia. The believers used to gather in Solomon’s Porch in the Temple. Here the apostles did many miracles; these miracles obviously convinced a big group of people who highly regarded the apostles. They even put their sick folk in the streets hoping that Peter’s shadow might go over them as he passed by! Many more were baptised. However “none of the rest dared join them “ (RSV). Many would not come to the Temple where the believers were because they were afraid of the rulers who opposed the new ecclesia. This soon came to a head.

The High Priest and Sadducees were extremely angry and jealous because the apostles were so popular. The Sadducees were particularly annoyed because the apostles spoke so fearlessly about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Sadducees did not believe in the doctrine of resurrection. So of course they wanted to silence the apostles. By their orders all the apostles were arrested and put in the common prison to await trial on the next day. Imagine being arrested when you know you have done nothing wrong. The apostles would have had to keep praying and put their trust in God.

DELIVERANCE! (vv.19-26)

While the city slept, an angel from God came to the prison and opened the doors for the apostles. He commanded them to go back to the Temple and continue to speak to the people “all the words of this life” (the gospel). Early in the morning they were back enthusiastically preaching. Meanwhile, imagine the surprise caused by their miraculous release. The soldiers who were sent to fetch the apostles for the trial returned with amazing news. The prison doors were locked; the guards were outside; but the apostles simply were not there! Where could they be? The authorities “doubted of them whereunto this would grow” - in other words, they must have known only God could have released the apostles. While they wondered what would come of this, a messenger came with the news that the wanted men were back as usual teaching in the Temple. No doubt the authorities felt rather embarrassed and a little less sure of themselves. The captain of the guard and his soldiers who went to fetch the apostles certainly did not use force “for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned”.

TRIAL (vv.27-39)

The High Priest indignantly reminded the apostles that they had been commanded not to speak of Jesus or speak in his name “and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine (teaching) and intend to bring this man’s blood upon us. They would not call him Jesus, for they believed that he was dead. And yet by their words they really acknowledged that they were responsible for the death of a righteous man. Peter certainly pressed the charge of murder on them in a bold and fearless speech. The accused became the accuser! Consider the points he raised.

- v.29 he and the apostles should obey God rather than men.
- v.30 the rulers of the Jews had killed Jesus; but **God** had resurrected him.
- v.31 God had also exalted Jesus to or at (RSV) His right hand; He was now a Prince and Saviour.
- v.31 For Israel to receive salvation and forgiveness they must repent
- v.32 There were two witnesses to the truth of Peter's words
- the apostles themselves
- the Holy Spirit - the miracles the apostles did by God's power showed that they were speaking the truth

We now see human nature at work again. Faced with overwhelming evidence - the release from prison and the words they could not argue against - what did the authorities do? Believe and repent? No! "They were cut to the heart and took counsel to slay them". How amazing and yet how often we do the same thing. We find it easier to be stubborn and respond in anger than to accept that we have been wrong. Let us learn the lesson - it could mean our life - it did for these proud men.

THE AUTHORITIES RELEASE THE APOSTLES (vv.34-42)

However to some extent reason prevailed. One of the rulers was a man called Gamaliel, a very learned and well-respected Pharisee, and also a doctor of the law. He showed logically that other men had risen up claiming to be leaders, and had drawn people after them. But in such cases the movement had been disbanded and came to nothing. He reasoned that this could happen with the apostles. On the other hand, if the apostles and their work were from God, what could man do? They could find themselves fighting God if they opposed the apostles. How right he was!

The Sanhedrin and rulers could see the wisdom of Gamaliel's words. However they still beat the apostles for the disturbance they had caused. They again ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. Despite this unpleasant and undeserved treatment the apostles did not leave in bitterness but in joy, "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame

for his (Jesus') name". They continued to teach the good news about their Master Jesus, now the risen Christ, wherever and whenever they could.

What a wonderful attitude they had to their suffering and persecution. They did not complain or become too scared to preach but instead considered it a joy to be able to suffer in a small way like their Master. They were thrilled to realise that they were following in his steps (Matt.16:24-25; Luke 6:22-23; Phil.3:10; 1 Pet.2:20-21). This should make us think about our own attitude. So often we are even too scared to tell someone at school that we have been to a Bible School or Youth Group activity. Why? They might laugh at us! We are unlikely to be beaten. Let us take courage from the example of the apostles for "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us" (2 Tim.2:12). Persecution can strengthen our faith and unite us around God's Word; we see this so often in countries overseas where it is not easy to be a Christadelphian.

PRINCIPLE FOR LIVING - OBEY GOD NOT MEN

These words of the apostles (v.29) are easy to read, but what do they really mean? In other places in scripture we are told to obey the authorities of the land we live in (Rom.13). Isn't there a conflict between these two ideas?

The principle is that where there is a conflict of interest we must always obey God. A prime example of this is conscientious objection. This occurs when a Christadelphian is called to vote or go to war or even to serve in a jury. You may say, "Why would it be wrong to serve in a jury?" The principle is the same in all cases. These are issues where we do not know God's will in the matter. How do we know whom God wants elected? If we were to vote we might choose the party we felt would make life better. But God might want to bring a country to its knees, ready to accept the need for Christ's rule. In a war, God might want a particular country to win to further His purpose in the earth. As Daniel was told "the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will" (Dan 4:17), and we certainly do not want to go against His Divine will and purpose.

We remember the words of Jesus "render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's". The right attitude therefore is to be law-abiding citizens except where the

law of the land conflicts with the laws of God (see Ex. 1:17; Dan. 3:18; Heb. 11:23-26). But if obeying God brings persecution we accept it, as faithful brethren did not so many years ago; some were imprisoned and ill-treated during the First and Second World Wars because they would not join the army.

SUMMARY AND LESSONS FOR US

- ☉ We see from the example of Ananias and Sapphira that we can never lie to God. Let us therefore be honest before men and God
- ☉ Instead of trying to impress people falsely, be like the apostles who fearlessly preached the gospel although they were imprisoned and beaten. When we do this, we share in a small way in the sufferings of Christ

VERSE TO REMEMBER

“For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps” (1 Pet 2:2 1)

FURTHER READING

“Story of the Bible” (H.P. Mansfield) Volume 13, pp. 33-39

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS

1. *What was wrong with the action of Ananias and Sapphira in bringing money from land they had sold?*
2. *In Acts 5 we read that the rulers wanted to kill the apostles. What was the wise advice of Gamaliel?*
3. *In Acts 5 we read of the apostles being imprisoned, questioned and beaten. What was the attitude of the apostles and believers to this persecution?*

ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. (a) *Give an account of the sin of Ananias and Sapphira.*
(b) *What lessons can we learn from this incident?*
2. *Describe the dramatic events of the arrest, deliverance, and trial on the second occasion when the authorities arrested the apostles, as recorded in Acts 5.*

6. STEPHEN: MARTYR FOR THE KINGDOM

“and they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake”

READING: Acts 6 & 7

OBJECTIVE

In this lesson we will consider the life and death of Stephen. Although chosen to look after the widows in the ecclesia he had a very solid grasp of the Scriptures. He proclaimed the gospel until it brought about his death.

BACKGROUND (Ch. 6v1)

The Jewish authorities made no more attempts to restrain the apostles so they were able to continue preaching. However the growth in numbers of believers brought problems. The twelve were spending increasing time on organisation rather than in prayer and teaching. Despite their attempts to do everything well, a group of Greek-speaking brethren came complaining. They claimed that the Hebrew speaking widows were better cared for than the Greek-speaking widows. The apostles promptly called the ecclesia together. They didn't argue or try to justify their position, even though they had done nothing wrong. They simply explained that it was not wise for them to neglect the word and prayer to care for the ecclesia. The ecclesia agreed to elect seven brethren of good reputation to look after the widows. These seven wise men were given the Holy Spirit to help them in their new work (v.6). The apostles were able to continue preaching; and many more believed and were baptised - including many priests (v.7).

STEPHEN, A MAN FULL OF FAITH (6:8-14)

One of the seven elected brethren was called Stephen, a Greek name suggesting he was a Greek speaking Jew. He was a man *“full of grace and power, who did great wonders and signs among the people”* (v.8 RSV). Although he had been chosen for a serving position he had an amazing grasp of the Scriptures and the ability to expound them powerfully. This brought him into conflict with some foreign Jews who wanted to argue about the Scriptures. But they met their match! *“And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake”* (v.10). The sensible course would

have been to think about what he said; instead human nature raised its ugly head. These angry Jews bribed men to raise false charges against Stephen “*We have heard him speak blasphemous (shocking and disrespectful) words against Moses, and against God*”. They knew that under the Law the penalty for blasphemy was death (Lev.24:16). How much they must have hated this righteous man. They stirred up the ordinary people in the streets as well as the elders and scribes. Consequently Stephen soon found himself dragged before the Sanhedrin. This was a group of seventy of the supposedly wise old men of Jerusalem. But how could Stephen expect a just trial from the same group who had so unjustly tried his Master not many years earlier.

BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN (6:13-15)

The false witnesses told the Sanhedrin that Stephen had been speaking blasphemous words against Jerusalem and the Law of Moses by saying that Jesus of Nazareth would destroy the city and abolish the Law. This was partly true! Jesus had taught that the Temple and the city of Jerusalem would be destroyed. He also taught that the customs of the law would be changed; true worshippers wherever they were, would worship in spirit and truth (John 4:20-24) as in fact God had always wanted. The Jews had built into the Law of Moses an amazing amount of extra detail and tradition, so that no one had any hope of keeping it. They had missed the point that it all pointed forward to the Messiah.

At this stage Stephen did not answer, but “all that sat in the council ... saw his face as it had been the face of an angel” (v.15). That should have been their answer. Why? Because the same thing happened to only one other man in Scripture - Moses, the man whom they said Stephen spoke against! How appropriate that Stephen began his speech by referring to “the God of glory” who appeared to Abraham. The same God was going to be with Stephen as he spoke, as Jesus had promised (Matt 10:17-20).

Stephen’s speech is a masterpiece! He referred to major characters and events in Israel’s history to show what is necessary to acceptably worship Yahweh. He set about to prove that:

- God’s purpose was not limited to any place. Yahweh could work outside of the land of Israel. (Note: This was about to happen again as the word of life was about to go out to the Gentiles).
- People had acceptably worshipped God without a Temple.

(Jesus had prophesied the destruction of the Temple so this would also happen again).

- The Law given by the hand of Moses was for Israel's instruction, but they had always broken it.
- Messiah was their hope – not the Law. But they had always rejected the prophets Yahweh had sent.

Yahweh always has been more interested in the attitudes which move men to serve Him, than buildings and places and customs. Consider the examples Stephen used:

(1) Abraham (vv.2-8)

- The God of glory appeared to Abram in a land of idolators – not the land of Israel.
- He was called 430 years before the Law of Moses existed, and still was pleasing to God.
- He moved to the land of promise but did not inherit any of it – he will in the future.
- His seed left the promised land and lived in a strange land for 400 years!
- Outside of the land of Israel God was with them and the nation grew from Jacob's twelve sons.

(2) Joseph (vv.9-16)

- Joseph was rejected by his brothers, the fathers of Israel – just as they had rejected Jesus.
- “God was with him” in the land of Egypt, his brothers in the land of Israel were wicked.
- Joseph became second to Pharaoh, just as Jesus was second only to God.
- Joseph never went back to the promised land – he died in Egypt
- His family had to leave the land because of famine - they multiplied in Egypt, the land of darkness

(3) Moses (vv.20-41)

- Their lawgiver was born in Egypt.
- Like Jesus he was rejected when he tried to deliver his people.
- In Midian God blessed him with two sons.
- God appeared to him in the burning bush in the wilderness - and the place was called “holy ground”, even though it was outside of the land of promise.

- He gave the people signs (1) in Egypt (2) at the Red Sea (3) in the wilderness, all outside of Israel.
- Moses prophesied about the coming of Christ (v.37, Deut.18:15-19).
- The angel spoke to him at Sinai and gave him the ten commandments and the Law but immediately the people of Israel rejected him and made a golden calf.
- Stephen did not say, but they all knew - he did not enter the Land.
- The nation did enter, but God eventually sent them into captivity because they worshipped idols instead of Him.

(4) The Temple (vv.41-50)

- Israel first worshipped Yahweh in a tent in the desert – not in a magnificent Temple like Herod’s.
- The Tabernacle was made to God’s requirements unlike the Herod’s Temple that they were so proud of.
- Joshua drove out the Canaanites, but the temple site was not captured until the time of David.
- David, “the man after God’s own heart”, worshipped acceptably without a temple – he set up a simple tent in Jerusalem.
- Solomon built a magnificent temple, but on the day it was opened he recognised that “the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands” (vv.48-49; 1 Kings 8:27).

STEPHEN CONDEMNS THE JEWS (7:51-53) Although Stephen did not mention Jesus at all, it is obvious that he was referring to him. Both Joseph and Moses were at first rejected by their brethren. Throughout history the people of Israel had rejected the words of the prophets and had often killed the prophets. In the same way the Jews had rejected Jesus’ message and killed the one who fulfilled the Law of Moses. They were the ones who broken the Law by killing “the Just One”, the sinless Son of God. They were just like their fathers.

THE MURDER OF STEPHEN (7:54-60)

The Sanhedrin had listened quietly to the power and logic of Stephen’s words. But now they rose up in great anger. They knew he was right - “they were cut to the heart”. But he had condemned them - he must die!

But Stephen's witness had pleased his Heavenly Father and he was given a vision to encourage him. He saw the Lord Jesus Christ standing at the right hand of His father, a sign that judgment would come on this wicked nation. The Sanhedrin would not listen any more; they thought this was just more blasphemy. Blocking their ears they rushed at him in rage, dragged him out of the city and stoned him to death. Can we imagine the agony of that cruel death Stephen suffered - the first of many to die for their Lord. Like his Lord "*he committed himself to him that judgeth righteously*" (1 Pet 2:23).

As Jesus was dying he cried "*Father, forgive them for they know not what they do*". Stephen could not say this; since Jesus' death there had been opportunity for the Jews to repent and change their ways. But after all they had done to him, Stephen said "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge". And he fell asleep. The men who stoned Stephen gave their clothes to be guarded by a young man called Saul, from Tarsus. Following Stephen's death this young man inflicted terrible cruelty on the ecclesia. But he must have thought about Stephen's words, for as we know he was converted and became the great apostle to the Gentiles. Imagine Stephen's joy at the day of resurrection to know that his death was not in vain.

PRINCIPLE FOR LIVING - PUT UP WITH THE HATRED OF OTHERS

How do we react when people ridicule us for having religious beliefs which make us different? Next time you are tempted to walk away, or answer rudely, or pretend you are not a Christadelphian, think about Stephen. He would not have died if he had stopped preaching when he received opposition. But he fearlessly defended the Truth, although he knew it could mean death. He knew his work was not in vain. He also knew that because he had been faithful to his Lord he would rise again to serve Him forever. No doubt he also took courage from the fact that Jesus had also suffered death at the hands of the Jews.

It is very unlikely that we will be called on to suffer death for preaching the Truth, although it has happened overseas. Let us be courageous and tell people about what we believe and the wonderful hope we have. As Paul told the young man Timothy "*if we be dead with him (Christ), we shall also live with him; If we suffer, we shall also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us*" (2 Tim 2:11-12)

SUMMARY OF STEPHEN'S SPEECH

- ☉ Abraham was called in a foreign land and did not receive his inheritance.
- ☉ Joseph, a deliverer, was rejected by his brothers but God was with him in Egypt.
- ☉ God raised up another deliverer, Moses, whom Israel rejected.
- ☉ God dwelt in the tabernacle in the wilderness, where He also gave the Law.
- ☉ God loved David although he never worshipped in a temple.
- ☉ Solomon built a temple but acknowledged that God did not live there.
- ☉ the Jews of Stephen's day were no different than their fathers; but they were more guilty because when they had God's Son in their midst they rejected and killed him.

LESSONS FOR US

- Stephen was chosen to care for widows but he could also expound God's Word powerfully - we can only do this by reading it each day.
- Let us not stop preaching because people oppose or criticise us but be courageous and preach when we have the opportunity.
- We can preach each day just by what we do and say.
- Don't be content to be part of ecclesial life and think that will save us - our hearts must be right in God's sight.
- Through Stephen's death Paul was converted and so we as Gentiles have heard the gospel - we never know the results of our work for God.
- Stephen was given a vision of the future; if we keep a vision of the kingdom in our minds, it will help us face troubles in life.

VERSE TO REMEMBER "But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him"
(John 4:23)

FURTHER READING

"Story of the Bible" (H.P. Mansfield) pp 35-52

"The Expositor" pp 154-223

"Speeches in the Acts" (J. Carter) pp 29-38

"The Oracles of God" (J. Carter) pp 94-105

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS

1. *In Stephen's speech what main point was he trying to show the unbelieving Jews?
Give an example to show how he did this.*
2. *Why did the Jews murder Stephen?*
3. *How did Joseph and Moses point forward to Jesus?*
4. *How must we learn to put up with the hatred of others?*

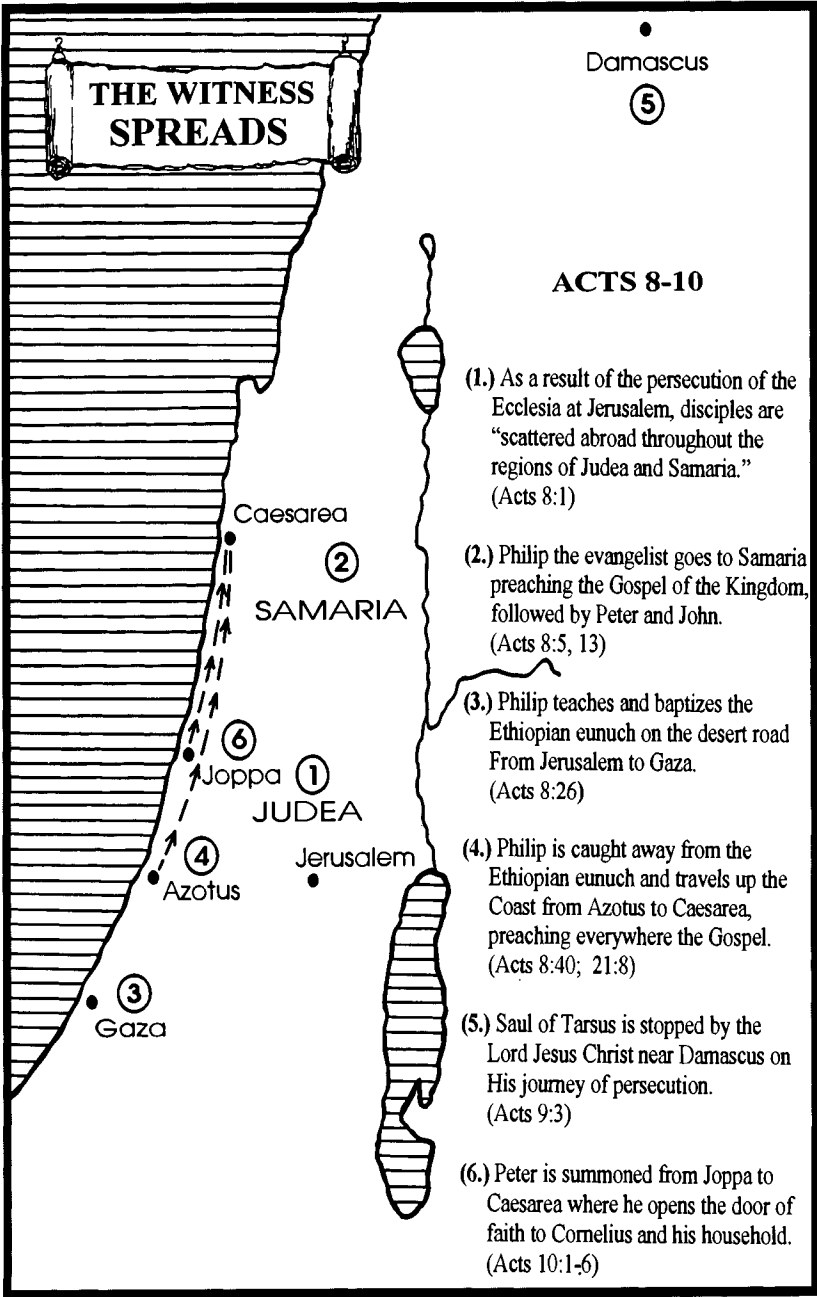
ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. *What were the charges which the Jews laid against Stephen? Briefly comment on how he answered them.*
2. *Outline the four main examples which Stephen used in his speech to show that God wants believers to worship Him in spirit and truth rather than in a particular place and manner.*

A FURTHER LOOK AT - Joseph in Egypt

It is a good exercise to colour in the words in Genesis 39 which show God's overshadowing care in Joseph's life - verses, 2,3,4,5,6, 21, 22,23. Because Joseph always trusted God, his Heavenly father caused everything he did to go well, even in prison. What an example to us! He was sent away as a young man to a land where nobody served Yahweh. Who would have known if he did wrong - Yahweh! Joseph always believed that, and so he always did the right thing. He had a strong conscience - he did not want to hurt the God he loved.





7. THE GOSPEL NET WIDENS

“Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word”

READING: Acts 8

OBJECTIVE

This lesson introduces to us the first of the “*other sheep*” (not from the “fold” of Israel) who Jesus said would hear his voice (John 10:16). Those without hope could now become children of God by faith, whatever their background - all “*one in Christ Jesus*” (Gal 3:28). The gospel net had widened, first north to Samaria and then south to Ethiopia. We will see how the Samaritans gladly accepted the gospel; but there was one who was baptised without true repentance. However the dark-skinned Ethiopian who was sincerely seeking the Truth went home rejoicing in his new hope.

BACKGROUND (vv.1-4)

Following the stoning of Stephen, violent persecution broke out against the Jerusalem ecclesia. For example Saul went into houses and dragged men and women off to prison (v.3). This caused its members, except the twelve apostles, to be scattered throughout neighbouring Judaea and Samaria. Some travelled as far away as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch (Acts 11:19). And wherever these disciples went, they preached the gospel. The Word of God could not be silenced.

THE TRUTH COMES TO SAMARIA (vv. 5-8)

Philip, who now had experience in caring for others (6:5) went down to Samaria to preach there. Normally the Jews despised the Samaritans who practised a mixed-up form of the Law of Moses (2 Kings 17:41; John 4:22). But Philip no doubt knew that Jesus had preached to the Samaritans with quite a deal of success; and at that time (John 4) Jesus had said that more labourers were needed in the area. In God’s providence the time had come. And Philip immediately “*preached Christ unto them*”. The response was overwhelming! “*And the people **with one accord** gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles*

which he did". There was great joy that they had heard the gospel and that their sick had been healed. However although the majority **heard** and **saw**, there was a man called Simon who was more interested in what he saw. He had been practising magic in Samaria for some time before Philip came; the Samaritans had believed that he was "*the great power of God*". But of course that changed when Philip came. The people believed the gospel and were baptised. Simon was amazed at the miracles Philip did, and so he was baptised too - but was it a baptism of true repentance?

THE VISIT OF PETER AND JOHN (vv.14-25)

The progress of the truth in Samaria was so remarkable that the apostles decided two of them should go down to help Philip. They laid hands on new brethren and sisters at Samaria so that they could receive the Holy Spirit (only the apostles could do this). The words Jesus had spoken in Acts 1:8 were beginning to be fulfilled - and all because of persecution! God works in amazing ways.

However when Simon saw the apostles do this, he was very impressed. If only he too could lay hands on people and give them power. How important he would become! And so he offered the Apostles money if they gave him their powers. We know that he did not want this for any good motive, for Peter rebuked him "*thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God*". Peter encouraged Simon to repent of his sin. How amazed Simon must have been to realise that through this wonderful power the apostles knew what he was thinking! Peter went on to say that Simon was "*in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity*". What does this mean? Peter was saying that Simon was trapped in a state of wickedness and captive to sin. He had been baptized "for what he could get out of it", as we would say today. Simon asked the apostles to pray for him so that he would not be judged by God (v.24). But of course he would have to prove himself worthy of forgiveness (v.22).

PRINCIPLE FOR LIVING - DON'T SEEK THE TRUTH FOR OUR ADVANTAGE

Obviously baptism is a very personal decision, but the lesson of Simon shows us that it is possible to be baptized for the wrong reasons. You are probably not yet ready to commit your life to follow

Christ. But be careful of being baptized for the wrong reasons. Consider what these may be:

- All my friends are being baptized
- Mum and Dad and other relatives want me to be baptized
- It will make people think I am good and I will be more “part of the group”
- I can get a girlfriend or boyfriend in the Truth
- I will be able to do duties in the ecclesia

However let us always remember that if the apostles knew Simon’s heart, how much more does our Heavenly Father know what is in our hearts. How wise we are to begin to study His Word and so “*grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*” (2 Pet.3:18). The more we study the Bible the more we will realise how gracious God has been in sending His Son to give us a way of salvation, and how much we need it. Then we will be ready to confess our sins and start a new life of service to our God. So let us do more than believe the signs of the times we can **see**; let us also **hear** God’s words and respond in **genuine** belief.

THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH (vv.26-40)

Following the incident with Simon, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem. As they went, they preached in many Samaritan villages. An angel directed Philip to go to the road leading to Gaza across the desert. He had another special work to do. On this desert route he came across an Ethiopian eunuch. Consider what we are told about this man:

- unmarried and unable to produce children.
- a high official of Candace queen of Ethiopia, he was in charge of all her treasures
- he had travelled over 1500 km from a country on the upper Nile in Africa to Jerusalem to worship the God of Israel
- and on the hot dusty road home he was reading - his Bible!

As the Ethiopian sat reading the words of the prophet Isaiah the Spirit of God told Philip to join to the man in his chariot. Philip’s first words were “*Understandest thou what thou readest?*” The Ethiopian replied “*How can I, except some man should guide me*” and he invited Philip to sit with him and explain the scriptures to him. The Ethiopian was reading the words of Isaiah 53:7-8 and couldn’t work out whether Isaiah was talking about himself or some other man.

Philip explained that Isaiah was speaking about the Son of God

who was slain unjustly without any natural children to continue his name. And of course Philip would have continued by telling the eunuch that Christ had been raised and was now at God's right hand; through Him all people, man or woman, Jew or Gentile, black or white, married or single, could be saved through forgiveness of sins in baptism (Gal 3:26-27). You can be sure that the Jewish teachers in Jerusalem had not told the Ethiopian about Jesus! But he obviously knew his Bible. He knew that the God of the Jews was the one true God and that His purpose was connected with the promises made to the fathers of Israel. Now he found that through baptism into Christ he could become a child of God and part of Abraham's seed. (Gal 3:28-29). Everything Philip said made sense and filled in the gaps for him. So much so that as they came to a stretch of water he said "*See, here is water! What is to prevent my being baptized?*" (v.36 RSV). Upon his confession of belief that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (v.37) the chariot was stopped.

BASIC BIBLE TEACHING - BAPTISM IS FULL IMMERSION

What happened next is encouraging and instructive. Philip and the eunuch both went down into the water, and Philip baptized this humble black man for the forgiveness of his sins.

Encouraging - because it shows us that we as Gentiles can also have the privilege of being part of God's purpose although it is based on the promises to the fathers of Israel.

Instructive - because it clearly shows what true baptism involves.

- (1) This was not a Pentecostal-type "on the spot" conversion. First God requires a knowledge of His plan and purpose. The eunuch had been taught the scriptures by his Jewish teachers and only needed to be shown that salvation was through Jesus Christ the Son of God who fulfilled all the types and promises of the Old Testament. The eunuch's confession of his belief in the Son of God was therefore not just words without meaning.
- (2) Notice that Philip and the Ethiopian "*went down both into the water*". This was no sprinkling of water on the head of a young baby. God requires us to go right down under the water. Why? Because this represents dying to the old way of life, and being brought back up out of the water (as though from the dead) to start a new way of life. We identify with Christ's death and resurrection (Rom.6, Eph.4:22-32; Col.3:1-17 etc.). In fact

the Greek word “baptizo” was used in the dyeing trade, where a garment was put right into a vessel of fluid to totally change its colour. This is the idea behind the word in the New Testament - a total change in our direction and commitment. *“If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above”* (Col 3: 1).

THE WORK CONTINUES

Following the eunuch’s baptism, the Spirit of God caught away Philip and he found himself in Azotus (Ashdod). He continued his preaching in the towns along the seacoast of Palestine which was mainly a Gentile area (vv.39-40). Meanwhile the Ethiopian eunuch, now Philip’s brother in Christ, continued his journey home. But what a different journey! He was full of joy because of his new-found hope. His understanding was greatly expanded. He too was a name bearer of Christ, an ambassador for Christ in his own far-away land. And we can imagine how hard he would have tried to convert those of his own nation.

SUMMARY AND LESSONS FOR US

- Terrible persecution of the Jerusalem ecclesia meant that the gospel was taken to other places. We should be like the Samaritans who believed the gospel when they heard the Word of God and saw the evidence of its truth (in our day, the signs around us that show Christ is coming).
- Let us not be like Simon; God requires a genuine belief in His Son and total immersion in the waters of baptism to demonstrate our repentance if we are insincere and hardened in sin like Simon was, we will be rejected at Christ’s coming. Instead we should be like the Ethiopian eunuch, a Gentile who gladly accepted the gospel.
- Let us also be like Philip who preached to others the exciting message of the Bible.

VERSES TO REMEMBER: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Gal 3:26-29)

FURTHER READING

“The Story of the Bible” (H.P.Mansfield) Vol.13, pp.56-64

“The Christadelphian Instructor” - Lessons 62,63, page 187

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS

1. *Describe the response of the Samaritans to the preaching and miracles of Philip.*
2. *What was wrong with the attitude of Simon the Magician? Why was it not acceptable to God?*
3. *Using examples from the lesson on Philip’s preaching to the Ethiopian Eunuch, show the conditions God requires for true baptism.*

ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. *Briefly describe Philip’s preaching work after Stephen’s death.*
2. *The gospel was taught in Samaria. What lessons can we learn from the attitude of:*
 - (1) *the Samaritan people*
 - (2) *Simon the Magician?*
 - (3) *The Ethiopian Eunuch was baptised by Philip:*
 - (1) *describe the events leading up to this*
 - (2) *describe the baptism*
 - (3) *what lesson can we learn from the attitude of the eunuch?*

DIGGING DEEPER

The Ethiopian was a eunuch, and he was reading from Isaiah. This is very interesting when we have a look at chapter 53 which he was reading from, and also the following chapters (54-56). How do these chapters relate to the circumstances of the eunuch?

8. THE CONVERSION OF SAUL

“He is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles”

READING: Acts 9:1-31; 22:1-22; 26:1-23

OBJECTIVE

This lesson will show how Saul - the fiery and determined Jew was humbled and how the whole course of his life was changed by God's intervention.

THE PREPARATION OF SAUL

The influence of the gospel of Christ was rapidly increasing. The time had come for the Gospel to go to the *“uttermost parts of the earth”* through God's chosen vessel - Saul. Paul later found out that God had chosen him from birth *“God separated me from my mother's womb”* (Gal.1:15-16).

By birth Saul inherited Roman citizenship, a great privilege in those times. His birthplace, the city of Tarsus, was the principal city, of the Roman province called Cilicia about 600 km. north of Jerusalem. It was a very important centre of Greek learning and commerce where Saul would hear of Greek customs and philosophy. He knew of Greek writers (Acts 17:28) and he spoke Greek (as well as Hebrew, Acts 21:40). There in Tarsus, Saul learned the trade of tent-making by which he would earn his living later on. Following a strict religious upbringing at home he was sent to Jerusalem to learn at the feet of Gamaliel, *“a doctor of the law had in reputation among all the people”* (Acts 5:34 see also 22:3). He became a Pharisee – the strictest sect of the Jewish religion (Acts 26:5). Eventually he could boast about his religious greatness (Phil.3:1-6).

Everything in his experience was to fit him for a future work: Roman citizenship, Greek education, Jewish religion. However, his overall direction had first to be changed, and when Paul considered his past qualifications as nothing then they could be fully used in God's purpose. It is likely Saul saw Jesus, and must have known of his crucifixion. He no doubt thought that it was a just reward for one so opposed to the precious Law! Jesus' growing group of disciples known as *“The Way”* must also be exterminated, thought Saul.

SAUL - THE CRAZED PERSECUTOR (verses 1, 2).

Saul believed the Law (the Torah) was supreme. Men who challenged it, like Stephen, had to be removed. Acts 8:1-4 records the spread of the persecution under Saul who was making havoc of the ecclesia in Jerusalem. Think of the awful things he did:

- He approved of Stephen's murder (Acts 8:1).
- He shut up many of God's chosen ones in prison, binding both men and women.
- He consented to the death of imprisoned believers, and
- He scourged many in synagogues, trying to make them blaspheme (Acts 26: 10-11).

Despite this, as has always been the case, persecution strengthens the cause of the Truth. Those scattered from Jerusalem "*went everywhere preaching the Word*". Unconsciously, Saul was helping the preaching of the Gospel. However, he was determined not to be defeated. He relentlessly pursued the fleeing believers to Damascus, a city about 250 kilometres north and governed at that time by Aretas, a king friendly to the Jews.

Saul, "*breathing out threatenings and slaughter*", obtained letters from the High Priest and the Sanhedrin addressed to the rulers of the Damascus synagogue. These authorised him to seize the Christians and bring them bound to Jerusalem. Saul made haste to leave for Damascus.

SAUL - HUMILIATED (verses 3-9).

Saul was full of brooding fury and hatred, and he ignored his teacher Gamaliel's advice not to be involved. He pressed on through the midday sun, when suddenly an intense light brighter than the sun, flashed around the company of men, and they all fell to the ground. Dazzled and bewildered, Saul fell too, speechless for terror. Then he heard a voice clearly calling, "*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?*" "*Who art thou, Lord?*" he asked, and the answer came, "*I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the pricks*" (RSV "*It hurts you to kick against the goads*"). Jesus of Nazareth! Alive! Stephen was right after all and he was wrong, so terribly wrong. He had been like an ox trying to go in the wrong direction, kicking against the goads.

Saul was trembling and astonished but said, *“Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?”* The Lord answered, *“Arise, and go into the city and it shall be told thee what thou must do”* (Acts 9:4-6). The voice told him that he had been appointed to turn people from darkness to light, that they may be forgiven and obtain life through faith (Acts 26:16-18).

Those with Saul had risen to their feet in the meantime but still stood speechless. The men with him had heard a sound but had not heard the voice distinctly. They had not seen anyone. Blind and led by the hand, Saul was brought into Damascus, to the house of Judas in the street called Straight. He came not as he expected, in triumph, but as helpless as the prisoners he had intended to lead out of the city.

Three dark days of repentance followed. Saul refused to eat or drink. We may be sure he was searching his heart. Yes, the visitation of the risen Christ was real. He must obey the voice that demanded that he change his way. Jesus of Nazareth **was** the suffering yet resurrected Messiah after all. After three days of prayer and meditation, the impression of the risen Christ still clearly on his mind, Saul’s repentance from his blaspheming and cruel ways was complete. Though blind, Saul was now beginning to see the whole purpose of God in His Son. That truth was more powerful than his own fierce efforts to eradicate it.

ANANIAS SENT TO SAUL (verses 10-19).

While Saul was repenting, another man in Damascus received a message from Christ. Ananias was told to go to Saul, lay hands on him and give him his sight. Hesitating at first because of Saul’s fearful reputation, Ananias finally went to Saul. When he laid hands on Saul, immediately something like scales fell from his eyes and his sight was restored. Ananias then told him the purpose of the vision on the way confirming what Saul had heard:

“The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know His will, and see that Just One and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth. For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard” Acts 22:14-15.

Saul was to be a chosen vessel bearing Christ’s name to Jew and Gentile. Humbled but converted by the incidents, Saul was immediately baptised to wash away his sins. Then he ate and was

strengthened, and the Holy Spirit. Saul then set out to rebuild the things he had before cut down.

SAUL BEGINS HIS WORK (verses 20-31).

Saul's life had been changed but he had not lost his vigour and zeal. Saul began at once to proclaim Jesus as the Son of God, in the Jewish synagogue Damascus! The Jews were amazed at his change of message. He preached that they "*should repent and turn to God, and do works meet (worthy of) repentance*" (Acts 26:20). Although Saul was a new disciple, nobody could resist his powerful arguments.

Galatians 1:17 tells us that Saul's next move was to go to Arabia. This time was probably for Paul to prepare for his later work and reflect on the reality and momentous significance of his conversion. Study and prayer were needed to fill out his understanding of His God and the Word of God. He returned to Damascus. His preaching steadily increased. The Jews in Damascus could not answer Saul's proofs that Jesus must be the Messiah (Acts 9:22). Opposition grew until the Jews laid a plot to kill him. Saul escaped by being lowered in a basket down the walls of Damascus. How humbling this was. "*For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake*" was beginning to happen.

Saul went back to Jerusalem. Three years had passed since he last left Jerusalem as the persecutor of the Christians. Now he returned to this city as a follower of Christ, on a mission of truth and peace. He thought apostles there would gladly receive him, but he was viewed with suspicion, and rejected. He won the friendship of Barnabas, who introduced him to Peter and James. Then he was given the right hand of fellowship. For a time he enjoyed fellowship, but in that city were many of his former Jewish friends. Though they were still very zealous for Judaism, Saul wanted to preach Jesus Christ to them. Soon he was found debating the very people who had brought about the death of Stephen. Opposition against him mounted quickly and one day while praying in Temple, Christ appeared to him in a vision, directing him to leave Jerusalem and preach to the Gentiles (cp. Acts 22:17-21).

Once more, with the aid of brethren, Saul escaped to Caesarea and was sent to Tarsus, his city of origin. Thus began the most exciting and adventurous preaching career ever recorded - Paul the apostle to the Gentiles (Rom.11:13).

SUMMARY AND LESSONS FOR US:

- ☛ The great persecutor of Christ's followers was the very man that God had called from his birth to be a chosen servant.
- ☛ Saul was stopped in his tracks by the appearance of Christ on the road to Damascus and the words he spoke.
- ☛ Saul was completely converted to the Lord Jesus Christ and became a preacher of the gospel of God as fulfilled in Christ.

VERSES TO REMEMBER: Acts 9:15-16 "But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake".

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

"The Story of the Bible" (H.P.Mansfield) Vol. 13, PP.53-56, 65-78.

"Paul the Apostle" (W.H.Boulton) pp.18-31.

"The Trial" (R.Roberts) pp.171-183.

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *Describe Saul's youth and life before his conversion.*
2. *What happened to Saul of Tarsus whilst on the way to Damascus?*
3. *For what purpose was Saul converted and how did he begin to fulfil this purpose immediately after his conversion?*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *Describe Saul's conversion to Christ.*
2. *Using the incident of Saul's conversion as an example, explain the meaning of repentance, conversion, baptism and newness of life.*

9. CORNELIUS THE FIRST GENTILE CONVERT

“God is no respecter of persons”

READING: Acts 10

OBJECTIVE

To show how God called the first Gentile to the gospel, by which we can have confidence that God is calling us too.

BACKGROUND

For many generations, Israel had thought that they were a superior nation. Jews considered themselves purer than the defiled Gentiles. But Jesus was declared, at his birth, to be a *“light to lighten the Gentiles”* (Luke 2:32 see also Isa.49:6). The apostles began to realise that the gospel would include Gentiles. God had called the Samaritans who had some link with the Jews and their religion. Then came a Jewish proselyte - an Ethiopian eunuch. Last of all came the greatest challenge – to baptise an uncircumcised Roman. For Peter this would be a real test.

CORNELIUS - THE ROMAN CENTURION (verses 1-8).

Cornelius was a centurion, or captain of 100 men, and belonged a company of soldiers called the Italian band, one of the more privileged bands of the powerful Roman army. He lived at Caesarea, the Roman headquarters in Palestine, and hometown of Philip. Despite his occupation and his strong Roman background, Cornelius had some wonderful characteristics. He was:

- a devout man
- a man who feared God (v.2, v.22). He feared God so much that his whole house was affected (v.2)
- generous to the people (v.2, v.4)
- continually in prayer (ch.10:2, 22, 35).

He was a sincere and religious man, one with whom God was able

work. God would answer his prayers.

It would be easy to suppose that by good deeds such as these, a man would surely be rewarded by God with a place in the Kingdom. But is not so. Cornelius needed to fully understand the gospel, to learn Jesus Christ of Nazareth, *“the only name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved”* (Acts 4:12).

At about 3 o'clock one afternoon, as he was praying, Cornelius saw a vision. An angel told him that his prayers and righteous acts had risen to God as an acceptable offering. Cornelius was instructed to send messengers to Joppa to fetch Simon Peter at the house of Simon the tanner. Peter *“shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved”* (11: 14). With these brief instructions, the angel departed. Cornelius realised how important this was. So he gave instructions to two of his household servants and a devout soldier (who normally was one of his constant attendants) to go to Joppa.

PETER'S VISION (verses 9-17)

Next day at noon, Peter went up to the housetop to pray as was the custom of the Jews. Waiting for the midday meal to be prepared Peter fell into a trance (a state like hypnotism). He saw in a vision heaven opened and a huge sheet being lowered down at its four corners. It was full of all kinds of animals, reptiles, and birds, obviously unclean under the Law of Moses (see Lev.11 for details). Then a voice commanded him: *“Rise, Peter, kill and eat”*. But Peter was horrified at the idea. He objected strongly, *“Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common (unholy) or unclean”*. The voice then addressed him again saying, *“what God has cleansed, that call not thou common”*.

Three times the voice commanded him to eat. Three times Peter refused. Although he was hungry, Peter did not forget the habits of his training. He had never eaten forbidden meats (Deut.14:7-8) and he was not prepared to be so defiled, even though God commanded him. Suddenly the sheet and its contents were taken up into the sky.

What could a command that directly contradicted the Law of Moses mean? Peter was to soon learn that the food in the sheet represented all types of people, Jew and Gentile, and that he could no longer isolate himself from the Gentiles. He had yet to learn that God cleanses all who come to Him through Christ.

PETER'S DOUBTS EXPLAINED (verses 18-33).

While Peter puzzled over the meaning of the vision, the messengers from Cornelius arrived. The Spirit of God advised him to go without any hesitation with these messengers, who in fact had been sent by God Himself. Having heard from the men of the mission he was asked to accomplish, he invited them in and gave them a night's lodging.

By morning, Peter was beginning to understand the significance of the vision. He set out with six brethren from Joppa, arriving at Caesarea the next day. In this centre of Gentile domination and power they found the centurion, along with his close friends and relatives, awaiting him. Despite his position of Roman authority, Cornelius fell at Peter's feet in deep reverence and humility. However, Peter quickly raised him to his feet, telling him that he also was a man like anyone else. Peter walked along side of the centurion and entered the Gentile's house. Peter was breaking the tradition he had once held. Here was a complete breakthrough of Jewish-Gentile barriers.

Inside the house Peter found a large assembly gathered. Guided by the Spirit, Peter explained to the people that although it was not normally lawful for a Jew to even visit a foreigner, God had shown him that he was not to call any "common or unclean" (Acts 10:28). Peter then asked Cornelius why he had called for him. In reply, Cornelius related the incident of his vision saying, "*now therefore we are all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God*" (v.33).

THE FAITH PETER TAUGHT (verses 34-43).

It is important that we note what Peter said. The turning point in the Acts of the Apostles had come. Peter pointed out:

- **vv.34-35** Undoubtedly God was no respecter of persons. He welcomes from every nation all those who fear Him and work righteousness (e.g.Cornelius) see vv. 34-35; cp.Deut.10:17.
- **vv.36-38** Both the people of Israel and Cornelius knew of the good news of peace in Jesus Christ, and of the fact that God anointed him with His Holy Spirit and of how he used it to heal people.
- **vv.39-41** The Apostles were witnesses of this one whom the Jews slew. God raised Jesus from the dead. He then showed himself openly to the Apostles, the witnesses chosen beforehand of God (their words were therefore reliable).

- **v.42** God “commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that Jesus is the one ordained by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that **everyone** who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name”.

GOD’S UNMISTAKABLE SIGN (verses 44-48).

Before Peter had finished speaking, God intervened by showing with a sign His approval of the group of Gentile converts. The Jews present were astonished that the Holy Spirit was poured out on these Gentiles, just as it had been on the Apostles on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 11:15; 2:4). Here were uncircumcised, unbaptised men praising the God of Israel with the gift of tongues! Turning to the six Jewish brethren who accompanied him from Joppa, an Peter said, “*Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptised?*” It was clear to all that these Gentiles believed in Jesus Christ and were approved of God (Acts 11:16-17). Peter then commanded them **all** to be baptised in the name of the Lord.

PRINCIPLE FOR LIVING - GOD IS NOT A RESPECTER OF PERSONS

The incident showed that in Christ there is “neither Jew nor Greek” (Gal. 3:28) for Christ had begun to break down the hatred between Jew and Gentile, his Gospel being one of peace and fellowship for both parties. Those who were “strangers and foreigners” were now “fellowcitizens with the saints” (Eph.2:12-19). In the words of Jesus there were others not of the sheep-fold of Israel who “shall hear my voice; and there shall be **one** fold and one Shepherd” (John 10:16). **Both** Jew and Gentile could now obtain the repentance which leads to life for in Abraham’s seed would “all nations be blessed”.

This principle that God would choose all men and women irrespective of background should be well understood by us. Paul says that nationality, bonds, and gender are all irrelevant in terms of finding acceptance with God (Gal.3:28). Our past life is also irrelevant (1 Cor.6:9-11). The only issue is whether we are people who in a spirit of meekness will accept and believe the message of salvation, and submit our lives to God.

SUMMARY AND LESSONS FOR US

- ☛ The events of Cornelius' baptism clearly indicated that God fully intended to call Gentiles to the hope of life. Jewish and Gentile believers were to become "*all one in Christ Jesus*". This calling, which began with Cornelius still continues today, with the same conditions still applying now as then and in this there are lessons for our eternal benefit.
- ☛ God will not accept us just because we do good deeds. He requires **belief and baptism** of us as He did of Cornelius. **Believing the Gospel** is essential to please God. The gospel was given to the Jew first and also to the Gentile (Rom.1:16-17).

VERSE TO REMEMBER: Acts 10:34-35 "Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him".

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

"The Story of the Bible" (H. P. Mansfield) Vol.13, pp.78-88

"Elpis Israel" (J.Thomas) Part 2, Ch.1, pp.202-209

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS

1. *Outline the character of Cornelius and show what he had to do in order to be saved.*
2. *Describe Peter's vision on the rooftop. What did it teach Peter?*
3. *What was the significance of the baptism of Cornelius?*
4. *How important is the principle that "God is no respecter of persons"?*

ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. *Briefly describe the events leading up to Cornelius' baptism.*
2. *"God is no respecter of persons". How was this lesson impressed upon Peter at the conversion of Cornelius?*

10. PETER ESCAPES FROM PRISON

“Of a surety the Lord hath sent His angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews”.

READING: Acts 12

OBJECTIVE

To show how God's care was with Peter to free him from prison to continue the Father's work.

BACKGROUND

About eleven years had passed Christ ascended – it was about the year 44. King Herod Agrippa 1 was at the height of his power. He was anxious to gain the favour of the Jews and quickly found that the easiest way to win general approval and popularity was to persecute the ecclesia.

THE DEATH OF JAMES (verses 1-2).

Herod was a ruthless and ambitious king, but he covered up his lust for power by pretending to follow Jewish religious customs. Publicly he claimed to serve God, but secretly he plotted to persecute the true people of God, the followers of Christ. Herod began his campaign of terror upon the ecclesia by seizing one of the ecclesial leaders. James, the brother of John, was arrested and executed *“with the sword”*, which means that he was publicly beheaded.

This murder threw the ecclesia into shock and mourning. They feared for their lives and the safety of their leaders. Herod, however, was greatly pleased. He saw that his action had pleased the Jews. His lust for power was not satisfied at this terrible murder and he wanted to shed the blood of more innocent victims. He decided to arrest Peter. He knew how important Peter had become and what effect his arrest would have on the already shaken ecclesia.

PETER IS IMPRISONED (verses 3-5).

Herod seized Peter just before Passover, and he decided to keep Peter in prison until the feast days were over. He did not want to upset the Jews by disturbing their religious services. He pretended to respect the Jewish ceremonies but in his heart, he was impatient at the delay in carrying out his death threat upon Peter.

Peter was therefore shut up in prison until the end of the seven days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread that was a part of the Passover. Security was tight to make sure Peter could not escape. He was bound with a double chain attached to two members of the guard, and there were also two others on watch outside the entrance to the prison cell.

Peter's imprisonment drew the members of the ecclesia very close together. They could only do one thing - pray. So for the rest of that week, day and night, the ecclesia prayed "*without ceasing unto God for him*" (v.5). They could well have had in mind the past deliverance of Israel out of Egypt at the time of Passover and here the ecclesia was fervently praying for deliverance from a cruel ruler. The feast was rapidly drawing to a close, and still Herod's plan remained unchanged. The last night before the day of execution saw the brethren and sisters gather in prayer at the house of Mary the mother of John Mark.

GOD SENDS HIS ANGEL (verses 6-11).

While the ecclesia was anxiously praying and counting the hours, Peter remained quite calm. Throughout the long week he also had prayed and now he was quite resigned to whatever would take place the next day. Peter slept. What a contrast Peter shows to the Peter who denied his Master in the court of Caiaphas. His faith had matured. Then he had denied with an oath that he was a follower of Christ. Now he calmly awaited his death – he would suffer for Christ's sake.

Suddenly an angel of the Lord stood by Peter and filled the dark prison with a bright light. He was shaken awake and heard the instructions to stand up quickly. Immediately his chains fell off from his hands. "*Bind on your girdle (belt) and your sandals*" continued the angel. As in a dream Peter obeyed and wrapping his cloak about him he followed the angel out of the prison. It all seemed a little unreal to Peter, for "*he wist not that it was true*

which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision” (v.9). They left, passing unseen by the guards both inside and outside the ward. At last they reached the large, heavy, outer gate of the prison, which opened of itself as they approached, leaving the guards standing as though in trance. They walked along one street in the city when suddenly the angel left him alone. He looked around in astonishment. He was free! His prayers had been answered in an amazing way. He now knew “of a surety that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews” (v.11).

For a moment he thought over his remarkable deliverance.

BASIC BIBLE TEACHING - *THE WORK OF THE ANGELS*

Paul says that the angels are ministering spirits “*sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation*” (Heb.1:14). The angels have a role in this period to help direct the lives of the saints and help them in their difficulties: “*The angel of Yahweh encampeth round about them that fear Him and delivereth them*” (Psa.34:7). Angels work in the lives of those who are not baptised to direct their lives to God. In Cornelius’ case God sent His holy angel to warn Cornelius to send for Peter. The angels will not appear in this way to us – but we can be sure that the same angels are watching over our needs. Of course, the angels have a great work to do in preparing the nations for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the kingdom their role will be taken over by faithful followers of Christ.

THE ASTONISHED ECCLESIA (verses 12-17).

Having got his bearing, Peter hurried to those who were praying for him. Although it was very late there were still brethren and sisters gathered together. He found the door securely bolted for fear of the Jewish authorities. When a young sister named Rhoda heard Peter knocking and recognised his voice, she quickly ran back inside leaving Peter standing outside. Overwhelmed with joy, she excitedly told the others that Peter was at the gate. They thought she was mad. But she insisted that it was Peter. They then thought it must be his angel (or ‘messenger’ as the word can signify). The tension of the nights of prayer and anxiety prevented them from believing in something that seemed too good to be true.

The knocking continued, however, until curiosity finally got the better of them, and opening the door, they saw Peter before their eyes. Excitedly they began to speak, asking him questions. Peter quietened them down and explained how that the Lord had delivered him. He told them to tell James (the Lord's brother) and the ecclesia. It was not wise, nor safe, for Peter the leader of the brethren to stay with them, and therefore, having given them instructions, he left immediately to hide in another place.

PRINCIPLE FOR LIVING - GOD LISTENS TO PRAYER

In the midst of trouble, Peter and his brethren and sisters set a good example for us in turning to God in prayer. The *“effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much”* is the advice of James (5:16). God will hear our prayers but He will decide, in His wisdom, when to answer them. He can do *“exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think”* (Eph.3:20), and this was demonstrated in the remarkable answer to their prayers when Peter was miraculously delivered. Although you are not baptised you can be certain that God is listening to your prayers and is ready to help you, that you might learn the truth of the gospel and be baptised.

JUDGMENT ON HEROD AGRIPPA (verses 18-25).

In the morning, Herod sent the soldiers to get Peter – but he was missing. No explanation could be given. Peter was no longer in prison. Herod became suspicious that the guards had deliberately helped Peter to escape. The soldiers were fearful of the penalty handed out to guards who allowed a prisoner to escape. They did not fear in vain. They were examined by torture and put to death.

Shortly after this, Herod was the special guest at a public ceremony designed by the people to win his favour. Standing before the crowds in his splendid royal clothes, he made a public speech. The crowd anxious to flatter the king, cried out their praise, *“it is the voice of a god, and not of a man”*. In Herod's mind this placed him as equal to the Roman Emperor who was looked upon as a god and worshipped. He loved the applause and his heart swelled in pride.

But immediately the angel of the Lord smote him with a terrible and painful disease. Within five days he died in agony. So Yahweh dealt with this persecutor of His people. The ecclesia recognised

his death as a sign of God's judgment, and was encouraged by these events to believe that God's hand overshadows the lives of all. With that renewed faith the brethren gave themselves to the work of the Truth, and the word of God grew and multiplied (v.24).

SUMMARY AND LESSONS FOR US

- ☛ Peter and the ecclesia learned again that Yahweh can deliver His children out of the worst circumstances. We, like them, can be brought through difficult times by the loving, guiding hand of God.
- ☛ We can show our appreciation for His guidance by accepting gratefully His call and dedicating ourselves in His service. If we do that then we will be assisting the Word of God to grow and multiply even in these last, perilous days of the Gentiles.
- ☛ The righteous judgments of God blazed forth against a wicked king who had slain one of the ecclesial leaders and imprisoned another. This taught the ecclesia, and us, that God rules in the kingdom of men. Men cannot persecute His people without finally receiving the just punishments of God.

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

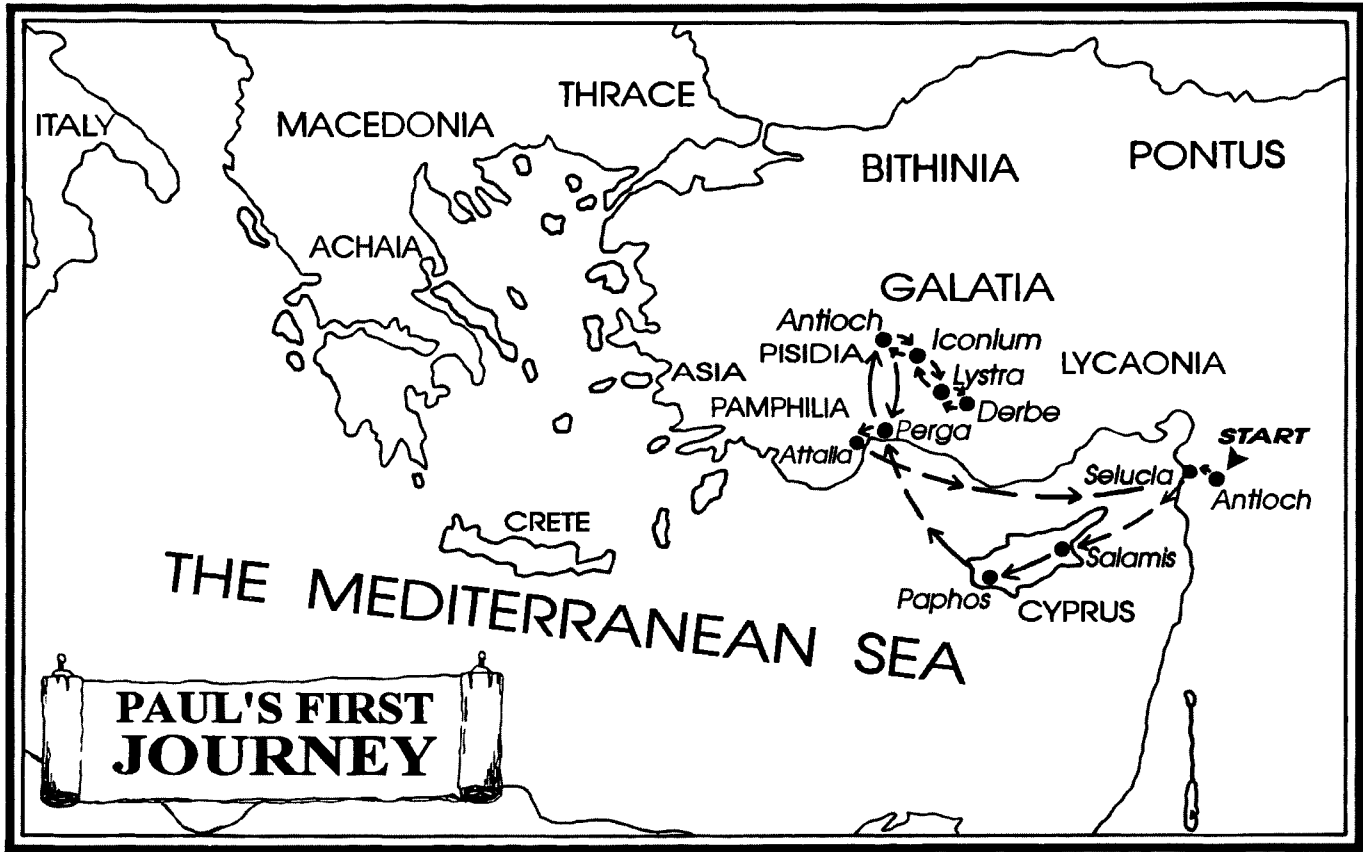
"The Story of the Bible" (H. P.Mansfield) Vol. 13, pp. 93-96

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *Why did Herod slay James?*
2. *Show how the ecclesia and Peter showed a trust in the power of prayer at the time of Peter's imprisonment.*
3. *Describe how Peter was delivered from prison.*
4. *How did God show His judgments upon Herod Agrippa?*
5. *Briefly explain the work of the angels today.*

ESSAY QUESTION

1. *Describe the imprisonment and deliverance of Peter from prison as recorded in Acts 12.*



**PAUL'S FIRST
JOURNEY**

The First Preaching Campaign

11. PAUL AND BARNABAS TURN TO THE GENTILES

“Lo, we turn to the Gentiles.”

READING: Acts 13

OBJECTIVE:

To show how God used Paul to take the gospel to the Gentiles.

BACKGROUND

Some years had passed since Saul’s dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus, during which time he had come to fully understand the great plan of salvation in Jesus Christ. He completed a year of service to the ecclesia at Antioch and took a famine-relief collection to Jerusalem (Acts 11).

THE SELECTION OF PAUL AND BARNABAS (verses 1-3).

Antioch in Syria had become an important centre for the preaching of the gospel amongst the Gentiles. Apart from Barnabas and Saul, a number of other prophets and teachers were there. Now the time had come for the truth to go out to all the world. The Holy Spirit spoke by one of them: *“Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them”*. They responded to the call.

With the blessing of the ecclesia upon them and their own fasting and prayer, they set forth on their mission, taking John Mark with them. What a huge task they faced! The world was steeped in immoral Gentile pagan worship. They would have the task of preaching Christ to them.

PREACHING THE TRUTH IN CYPRUS (verses 4-12)

Leaving Antioch, they travelled on foot to a port called Seleucia. From there they took ship to the island of Cyprus, the birthplace of Barnabas. This was a natural place to start as Barnabas knew it well and would perhaps still have friends and relatives there. They arrived at Salamis,

where they commenced their preaching in the synagogues of the Jews. Barnabas and Saul travelled on foot throughout the island until they came to Paphos, the capital. There Sergius Paulus, the Roman governor of the island, wanted to hear from them the Word of God. He became extremely interested, much to the annoyance of a certain Jew; a false prophet named Bar-Jesus (also called Elymas the sorcerer). He knew that if Sergius Paulus believed the Gospel, the governor would not be influenced by his magic anymore.

So he began to contradict Saul only to be told by Saul that he was the “*enemy of all righteousness*” and fixing his eyes on the wicked Elymas, Saul declared that he would be blind for a season. The man who claimed to have supernatural power had to be led around! The governor was astonished; but he recognised in what he saw the hand of God. He believed that the Truth was far more powerful than sorcery.

It is at this stage that Saul became known as Paul, and it appears, Paul took over the role of leader of the party. From now on it was no longer “Barnabas and Paul” but “Paul and Barnabas”.

IN GALATIA (verse 13)

Leaving Paphos by ship, the party came to Perga in Pamphylia, and there John Mark unfortunately left the work and returned to Jerusalem. Paul pressed on up to the more mountainous region of Galatia. He journeyed to Antioch of Pisidia, a distance of approximately 170 kilometres north of Perga. The road was both difficult and dangerous, the area being thick with robbers (cf. 2 Cor.11:26).

AT THE SYNAGOGUE IN ANTIOCH (verses 14-41).

When they arrived in Antioch, Paul was quick to find the synagogue and on the first sabbath day, he and Barnabas entered and sat down. After the prayers and the reading from the Law and the Prophets, they were invited to address the assembly. Paul recognised two groups in the audience, (a) “*men of Israel*” - the Jews, and (b) “*ye that fear God*” - Gentile proselytes to the Jewish faith. Paul called upon both to “*give audience*”.

vv.16-21 God’s care for Israel from Moses to Saul

Yahweh had shown His love to His people in leading them out of Egypt and caring for them in the wilderness. They had not thanked

God at all, but He still led them into the land of promise. Then “He gave them judges” but they wanted a king. They got the sort of king they wanted – but Israel so often made mistakes.

vv.22-23 The promise to David of a righteous king

God then provided the king they really needed – David. But David was promised an even greater King in 2 Samuel 7, but one that would be his descendant.

vv.24-25 The teaching of John the Baptist

The people of Antioch would have heard of the preaching of John the Baptist who prepared the nation for the coming of a greater one.

vv.26-29 Give heed to God’s work in Christ

According to the words of the Old Testament the Jews had crucified their Messiah. Even though the Jews in Jerusalem like the Jews in Antioch read the scriptures, they fulfilled them by killing Jesus.

vv.30-37 Jesus raised from the dead to be a saviour

The good news to the people of Antioch was that God had fulfilled His promise in raising up Jesus as promised in Psalm 2:7 (quoted in verse 33). Although they had crucified their Messiah God had raised him from the dead as prophesied in Psalm 16:10 “Thou shalt not suffer thy Holy One to see corruption”.

vv.38-41 A message of hope and a warning

Forgiveness of sins was promised to them – this was more than the Law of Moses could provide. But Paul left them with a strong warning of judgment from God if they followed their fathers’ example and did not heed the word of God concerning His Son (vv. 40-41).

BASIC BIBLE TEACHING - *CHRIST SUFFERED FOR THE SINS OF THE WORLD*

Paul explained to them the suffering Jesus had gone through. God had “*raised unto Israel a Saviour*” (v.23) but they had asked a Gentile ruler to kill him and crucify him on “*the tree*” (v.29). However, the sin of the Jews in Jerusalem had resulted in salvation being made available, not only to Jews but to us Gentiles. We have the advantage of the gospel being made available to us – a gospel that teaches us that Christ died that we might have “*the forgiveness of sins*” (v.38).

THE DOOR OF TRUTH OPENED TO THE GENTILES (verses 42-52)

Many of the Jews and proselytes were very impressed. They had heard nothing like it before. The Gentiles in particular were excited about the new teaching and wanted to hear more. So the next sabbath saw almost all the people of Antioch came to hear Paul. When the Jews, however, saw how many Gentiles were attracted to the new teaching, they became jealous and stirred up trouble. They continually contradicted and blasphemed the words of Paul. Then Paul and Barnabas rose up and told them how God had first sent His servants to the Jews but *“seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles”* (vv.46, 47). Paul’s work with the Gentiles was prophesied in the Old Testament scriptures in Isaiah 49:6, *“I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth”*. These words of Isaiah really apply to Christ. Paul saw himself as the Lord Jesus Christ shown to the Gentiles. The Gentiles glorified God and a great many believed and were baptised.

So the gospel spread throughout the region but not without the Jews raising a great persecution against Paul and Barnabas. They convinced the leaders of the city that they should remove Paul and Barnabas. Being forced to leave, they moved on to Iconium, but with no disappointment for *“the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit”* (v.52). God had blessed the first stage of their journey through Galatia, that many should believe the Gospel. Through Paul as a chosen vessel, God had brought a light of Truth to many Gentiles.

PRINCIPLE FOR LIVING – THE PROBLEM OF ENVY

Pilate knew that the Jews delivered Jesus to death because of their envy. The Jews of Antioch were no better. They were jealous of Paul’s influence. They were determined to discredit Paul and Barnabas and persecute them until they departed (v.45, v.50). Envy is like covetousness but with malicious intent (Titus 3:3). People who are envious do not care if they hurt those they envy (James 3:14-16; 4:4-6. cp.1 Cor.14:4). We can be envious of other young people because they look better than us or are better than us at certain things. Envy is a dreadful sin, because our goal should be to please God – it does not matter how other people compare to us.

SUMMARY AND LESSONS FOR US:

- Paul and Barnabas were given a difficult mission of spreading the Gospel message throughout the world.
- Despite those who refused the Gospel, like Elymas and those who persecuted them at Antioch, they kept on with their work. They were determined not to let such obstacles, which would seem too overwhelming for most of us, hinder the progress of the Gospel. Let us not be turned aside from our preparations to accept the salvation offered by the risen Lord Jesus.
- Let us always be sure that we are eager to listen to the Word of God, to be “glad and glorify the word of the Lord” in our lives. We can be like those Gentiles at Antioch who were attracted to the light of that wonderful salvation in the risen Lord, believed and were baptised.

REFERENCE LIBRARY.

“The Story of the Bible” (H. P. Mansfield) Vol.13, pp.104-109

“Paul the Apostle” (W. H. Boulton) pp. 38-52

“The Letter to the Galatians” (John Carter)-Introduction

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *Describe what happened when Paul met Sergius Paulus and Elymas.*
2. *How did the people of Antioch in Pisidia react to the preaching Of Paul?*
3. *Explain why Paul and Barnabas said, “Lo, we turn to the Gentiles”.*
4. *Why were the Jews envious? What is the problem of envy?*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *Describe the preaching work of Paul and Barnabas on the island of Cyprus (including their meeting with Sergius Paulus and Elymas).*
2. *Summarise briefly Paul’s address in the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia.*
3. *Prepare a Bible insert page showing Paul’s first journey.*

12. PERSECUTIONS IN GALATIA

“persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra”

READING: Acts 14

OBJECTIVES

To show how that through much tribulation we must enter the kingdom.

BACKGROUND

The joy with which the Gentiles received the Truth in Antioch of Pisidia contrasted sharply with the anger and hatred that Paul and his new doctrine aroused amongst the Jews. Their hatred became such that they stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas forcing them to leave Antioch and move on to Iconium, Lystra and Derbe to spread the Gospel there, before returning to Antioch.

OPPOSITION IN ICONIUM (verses 1-5).

Expelled from Antioch, Paul and Barnabas made their way in a south-east direction to Iconium at the western edge of the vast central plains of Asia Minor. They travelled some 130 km along one of the many good Roman highways until they reached a city called Iconium. Although Paul had said, *“Lo, we turn to the Gentiles”*, he and Barnabas still acted on the principle of *“to the Jew first”*. So on their arrival they first went to a synagogue where they spoke such effect that they met with immediate spectacular success: *“a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed”* (v.1).

The other Jews were horrified. These unbelieving Jews would not allow themselves to be persuaded by the logical and powerful arguments of Paul and Barnabas. They stirred up trouble just like the Jews of Antioch had. They went to the civil authorities and influenced them to despise the brethren. But Paul did not let this hinder their work. They made good use of the publicity the Truth

was receiving, and determined to make the most of it while they could. To their preaching of “the word of His grace” God added “*signs and wonders done by their hands*” (v.3). These signs and miracles confirmed the truth of their teaching.

For some time the issue between Paul and the Jews was hotly debated, until the whole city became divided into two camps. But when a riot threatened, and Paul and Barnabas could see that the Jews were planning to stone them to death, they could see that their work at Iconium had ended for the moment and so they hurriedly left for Lystra.

A LAME MAN HEALED IN LYSTRA (verses 6-10).

Paul and Barnabas left the main highway and travelled the 30 km. in a south south-west direction to Lystra. They entered a much less civilised region known as Lycaonia (meaning *wolf-land*). Unlike Antioch and Iconium, Lystra and Derbe had only a few Jews and therefore they were without synagogues. So in this semi-barbarous Gentile setting, the Gospel was proclaimed and one man in particular listened very intently. He was a man “*impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother’s womb, who had never walked*”. Paul’s teaching of salvation concerned a future time when Christ will heal the world’s sickness, disease, and weakness. Paul, perhaps perceiving this man’s faith, called upon him to “*stand upright on his feet*”. The cripple not only stood, but leaped and walked. He was completely cured.

THE PEOPLE WORSHIP THE APOSTLES (verses 11-18).

The effect of this miracle on the people was beyond the apostles’ expectations. They reasoned correctly that such a miracle was extraordinary. In their misunderstanding of the source of the power behind the miracle, they thought that the pagan gods had come down to their city. In their excitement they shouted out in their own language, “*the gods are come down to us in the likeness of men*” (v.11). Paul and Barnabas soon became alarmed at the excitement of the crowd as the people brought oxen and flower garlands, desiring to make a sacrifice unto the apostles. They named Paul, Mercurius - a god who they believed was young, small, fluent, and active; and Barnabas, they named Jupiter - a god who

was believed to be older, taller, and more imposing. The people excitedly organised a festival to these “gods” who had honoured their city by visiting them in human form and performing such a sensational miracle.

Paul and Barnabas were disturbed to see that the miracle had been misunderstood as the work of pagan gods. Had the apostles been like most men they might have sat back and enjoyed the praise of the crowd. But they were men who sought the honour of the one true God. They rent their clothes to show their protest and sorrow. They quickly ran among the excited crowd trying to stop the festivities and shouting, “Sirs, *why do ye these things*” (vv. 15-17). With great difficulty Paul and Barnabas were able to control the crowd. They appealed to the crowd to recognise the healing of the lame man as a sign of the power of the living God. That power was also evidenced in the cycle of the seasons throughout which the living God lovingly provided for all His creation. Finally the people turned away feeling rather embarrassed and resentful against their two visitors.

BASIC BIBLE TEACHING – GOD IS ONE

The people of Lystra like most of the pagan world believed in many gods. How different was this new teaching of Paul and Barnabas. Yahweh had taught His nation Israel through Moses: “*Hear O Israel, Yahweh our God is one Yahweh. And thou shalt love Yahweh thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might*” (Deut.6:4-5). Jesus in Mark 12:30-31 repeated this fundamental teaching The scribe who was talking with Jesus said: “*Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he: And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices*” Mark 12:32-33. This basic doctrine was that taught by all the apostles: “*For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*” (1 Timothy 2:5; 1 Cor.8:6). We should be glad to understand this basic doctrine and not foolish ideas like the Trinity.

TWO RESPONSES TO PAUL'S PREACHING (verses 19-20).

1. Rejection:

Certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium soon arrived at Lystra and quickly took advantage of the people's resentment towards the apostles. These hostile Jews stirred up the men of Lycaonia to carry out a shocking act of violence. These fickle and emotional Lycaonians stoned Paul, dragged his bruised and battered body through the city, and dumped him outside. So terribly was he treated that they all thought he was dead. A sorrowful group of disciples gathered around the body of Paul, shocked by the awful treatment he had received by the crowd. Suddenly he stirred to life, stood upon his feet and with a tremendous show of courage, went right back into the city of his persecutors! What amazing courage Paul had!

2. Acceptance:

Amongst the small Jewish community in Lystra was a young man of great faith called Timotheus (or *Timothy*, meaning "valued of God"). He was the son of a Jewess who had married a Gentile and his mother and grandmother had taught him the Old Testament scriptures (2 Tim.1:5; 3:14-15). The word of God had made a deep impression upon him. This, together with the powerful preaching of the apostle Paul, convinced Timothy of the need to become a disciple of Christ. And when he saw the courage of Paul he decided to dedicate his life to Christ and the building up of the little ecclesia recently formed by Paul's preaching. He had witnessed Paul's sufferings at Lystra for the sake of the gospel (2 Tim. 3:10-11) and largely because of that example, Timothy later became a faithful fellow-labourer with Paul (see 1 Cor.4:17, Phil. 2:19-22).

PRINCIPLE FOR LIVING - THROUGH MUCH TRIBULATION WE MUST ENTER THE KINGDOM

As we grow older we will find that life brings many "pressures" (tribulations) which may cause us great sorrow of mind or even physical harm (2 Tim.3:1). It is unlikely that we will be called upon to endure the persecutions that the apostles suffered but we will have our own trials to bear. Paul says that it is for "our profit" that God allows this to happen (Heb.12:10). But if we "endure" and trust in God to deliver us, we will develop characters fit for

His kingdom (Heb.12:6-11). This is the purpose of tribulation. No matter what our trials, knowing that Jesus overcame all things with God's help and is now able to help us to do the same (John 14:27; 16:33).

THE VISIT TO DERBE (verses 20-21).

Once more, the crisis with the townspeople forced the brethren to move on to Derbe, some 70 kilometres east of Lystra. Their Jewish persecutors probably thought that they had silenced Paul. The apostles were therefore not impeded in their preaching activity at Derbe. A successful campaign was conducted (v.21 mg.). Here another notable disciple, Gaius, was converted. He later became one of Paul's travelling companions (Acts 20:4).

STRENGTHENING THE ECCLESIAS ON THE RETURN JOURNEY (verses 22-28).

With the work at Derbe completed, the apostles recognised an urgent need to encourage the ecclesias they had just established. They retraced their steps, undaunted by the opposition and persecution they had experienced at most of the cities during their forward journey (cp. 2 Tim.3:11). The apostles recognised the need of all new believers to be established in the Faith by being given further instruction in the things of God. It was this aspect of the work that they concentrated upon on their return journey. Paul's own experiences illustrated his exhortation that they must continue in the faith whatever the opposition, and that it is "*through much tribulation*" that we must "*enter into the Kingdom of God*".

They came again to the port of Attalia and sailed back to Antioch in Syria. It had been approximately two years since they left and there was much to tell. The brethren and sisters rejoiced to hear how Yahweh had worked so wondrously in the lives of Paul and Barnabas on this the first campaign. They had endured great sufferings but they were able to rejoice with the ecclesia in the knowledge that "*God had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles*" (v.27).

SUMMARY AND LESSONS FOR US:

- ☛ God was with Paul to bring the light of Gospel truth to the Gentiles dwelling in the darkness of superstition and ignorance. But in so doing God was showing his chosen vessel how great things he must suffer "*for my name's sake*" (Acts 9:15,16). Yet

Paul rejoiced, counting it a privilege that he could serve Christ, who had given his life that others, like Paul, might live. We, too, should think seriously about the privileges and demands of the Truth's service, and in making our decision, be encouraged by Paul's faithful and courageous example.

- ☛ Another good example for us is that of Timothy, a young man who loved the scriptures and overcame his shyness by a faithful and unselfish dedication to the service of the Truth - to Paul and to the ecclesia. We can all be Timothys!

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

"The Story of the Bible" (H. P. Mansfield)-Vol. 13, pp. 110-120

"Paul the Apostle" (W. H. Boulton)-pp. 53-62

"The Letter to the Galatians" (John Carter)-pp. 11, 17, 49, 61-62

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS.

1. *Why were Paul and Barnabas forced to leave Iconium?*
2. *Why was Paul stoned at Lystra?*
3. *What lessons can we learn from the example of Timothy of Lystra?*
4. *Despite earlier persecutions, Paul and Barnabas retraced their steps through Galatia - why?*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *What were the results of Paul healing a lame man at Lystra?*
2. "We must through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22).
 - (a) *Explain how Paul and Barnabas' journey to the Galatian cities of Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe illustrates this principle.*
 - (b) *How does it apply to us?*

13. THE JERUSALEM CONFERENCE

“Ye must be circumcised and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment”

Reading: Acts 15

OBJECTIVE

This lesson shows that we are not bound by the Law of Moses but can have freedom in Christ. This freedom brings us a responsibility to care for others.

BACKGROUND

After returning to Antioch, Paul and Barnabas stayed there for a long time. However, certain brethren coming up from Judaea marred their stay. These brethren insisted that the Gentiles should be circumcised, and that all should keep the Law of Moses. This opposed the results of the apostles' preaching; for God had worked through them to “*open the door of faith unto the Gentiles*” (Acts 14:27). The problem was a serious one and could only be solved by a gathering of the apostles and elders at Jerusalem. This became known as “The Jerusalem Conference”.

OBEY THE LAW OR PERISH (verse 1).

Certain brethren of Judaea, who before the acceptance of the truth had been Pharisees (v.5), told the Antioch brethren, “*Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses YE CANNOT BE SAVED*” (verse 1). They also insisted that the keeping of the whole Law of Moses was necessary (v.5). But they failed to realise that at no time could the mere keeping of the Law of Moses save anyone. The Law was given:

- that men might realise that they were sinners before God (Rom.3:19-20).
- to be a schoolmaster to educate and guide men to Christ (Gal.3:24). Therefore all the sacrifices and ordinances of the Law pointed forward to Jesus in glorious types.

When Jesus died and rose again the Law had served its purpose of preparation. From that time until now there is a period of grace in which we are saved by faith in Christ. A life of holiness shows our respect and appreciation for that position of grace.

ON THE WAY TO JERUSALEM (verses 2-5).

The issue was so important and there was so much argument about it (v.2), that the apostles decided to go down to Jerusalem and discuss it with the rest of the elders and apostles. On their way Paul and Barnabas passed through Phenice and Samaria, and told the brethren there of their successful journey through Cyprus and Galatia, *“and they caused great joy among the brethren when they heard of the conversion of the Gentiles”* (v.3). Arriving at Jerusalem they met with the apostles and elders and declared how marvellously God had worked through them. They emphasised God’s part in their work among the Gentiles, and their own work merely as His servants. God had so obviously blessed this work. For instance, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit power showed God’s approval and authorisation of the apostles’ preaching activity with Gentile believers. But their joy could not abound for there was still much disagreement about the Law of Moses. A large number of priests had believed the Gospel (Acts 6:7) and many of the Pharisees were numbered among the believers (Acts 15:5). It was this group of converted Pharisees that could not shake off the exclusive rites of the Law of Moses.

THE JERUSALEM CONFERENCE (verses 6-18).

A group of elders and apostles gathered to discuss this problem. After much argument the apostle Peter rose up to speak (v.7).

Peter’s speech (vv.7 – 11) He spoke of the conversion of Cornelius when Peter had been called upon to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles. God, by giving Cornelius and his family the Holy Spirit, showed that there was really no difference between Jew and Gentile (vv.8-9) and none should be called common or unclean. The vital element in God’s dealings was FAITH. The Law was now an unnecessary burden that was too difficult to keep, for their fathers had failed in their attempt to obey it (v.10). The law was not the means of salvation, but rather salvation was through the grace of Jesus Christ (v.11).

Paul and Barnabas (v.12)

After Peter had spoken, Paul and Barnabas rose and spoke of their successful missionary journey. If indeed the Gentiles were not to come into the truth based on their faith in Christ, why had God allowed them to use miracles to convince multitudes of Gentiles? Would God bless conversions of which He did not approve?

James' speech (vv.13-21)

James finally spoke to the conference and sealed the matter. Referring to the work done among the Gentiles, James quoted the words of the prophets (Jer.12:15; Amos 9:11-12; Isa.45:21) to show that the call of the Gentiles was intended by God. They were to be called out, like Israel out of Egypt.

James, the Lord's brother was one of the leaders of the ecclesia, for Paul describes him as a pillar of the ecclesia (Gal. 2:9). James was in close contact with the Jewish brethren and sisters and even wrote an epistle to them. James had grown up with Jesus and when he was finally converted, was a man of great wisdom. James' argument from the prophets clinched the whole matter. It was quite evident that God had a purpose with the Gentiles as well as with the Jews.

THE JUDGMENT MADE BY JAMES (verses 19-35).

Since it was in God's plan that the Gentiles should be saved, it was not good that they should be troubled with Israel's burdensome Law of Moses (v.19). But there were four things that James decided the Gentiles should abstain from for the time then present-pollution of idols, fornication, things strangled, and blood (v.20).

1. Meats offered to idols: though an idol is "nothing in the world" an offering of meats to idols could cause a weak brother's conscience to fail (see 1 Cor. 8: 10-11).

2. and 3. Things strangled and blood: as the ecclesias were made up of Jews and Gentiles it was best for the sake of peace to thus abstain and avoid upsetting the deep feelings of Jewish conscience to these things (cp. Lev.17:10-15).

4. Fornication: both then and now fornication (immorality) is condemned by God despite the attitudes of this "permissive age" (1 Cor.6:18; cp. Matt. 5:27-30). In their day this was tied up with the worship of idols. In our day it is encouraged by many forms of entertainment.

The apostles and elders agreed with James, and a letter was sent by the hand of Paul, Barnabas, Silas, and Judas with others to all the brethren, giving a summary of their conclusions. These brethren took the letter to Antioch and read it to all the brethren and sisters who were comforted that the problem had finally been resolved. Although

Paul, Barnabas, and Silas could have returned to Jerusalem with the other brethren, they decided to stay and help the ecclesia.

PRINCIPLE FOR LIVING - ABSTAIN FROM MATTERS THAT HARM OTHERS

Sometimes we might decide that we have no problem with a matter of daily living. It does not affect us and we have freedom in Christ to do it. This may relate to a place we want to go to or some activity we want to be involved in. But let us also understand other people's feelings. James forbade three practices because they would upset others. Paul exhorts us, "*Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others*" (Phil. 2:14). "*Love*", says Paul, "*seeketh not her own*". Again he writes, "*Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself*" (Rom. 15:2-3). If we really love one another we will attempt to help each other, and not to offend each other.

In addition to this issue of love to each other two other matters are raised:

1. It may not harm us but it may harm another young person we take along with us. Paul warned the brothers and sisters of Corinth: "*But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak ... And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?*" (1 Cor. 8:9,11). How would we feel if a young person lost interest to the Truth because of something we had introduced them to?
2. Some matters may seem harmless to us, but actually may be harmful. "*Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth*" (Rom. 14:23). It should not be our attitude of finding out how close we can get to the world but try to get as close as we can to God.

PAUL CHOOSES SILAS (verses 36-41).

After some time teaching and preaching in Antioch, Paul decided to go back to Galatia and visit the ecclesias, and so he invited Barnabas to accompany him. However, Barnabas wanted to take John Mark with them. Because Mark had left Paul and Barnabas on their first preaching campaign Paul did not want to risk such a let-down again. The disagreement was so strong between them that Barnabas left Paul and taking John Mark sailed to Cyprus to preach there. Paul took Silas and departed on his second preaching campaign with the blessing

of the ecclesia on him. Later Paul was willing to forgive and accept Mark who, despite his earlier faults, rapidly matured to become a very valuable fellow-labourer in the Gospel (see 2 Tim. 4:11; Col. 4:10).

SUMMARY AND LESSONS FOR US

- The Apostle Paul acted quickly to correct the error that could endanger the new ecclesias. The Judaisers were denying the effectiveness of Christ's sacrifice.
- It was a burden dragging the Gentiles into bondage to law in direct contrast to the freedom that came with grace. We must see the Truth clearly too. We need to believe in the position of grace that is held out to us - an offer which we, in the midst of a world given over to sin, cannot afford to neglect.
- How thankful, then should we be that God has shown mercy on Gentiles so that we can believe in Him! God wants us to have faith in Him and be baptised into Jesus Christ. Each day, wherever we are, what we do should really show that we have learned about God and desire to please Him.

REFERENCES:

"Story of the Bible" (H.P.Mansfield) Vol. 13, pp.121-135

"Paul the Apostle" (W.H.Boulton) pp.63-72

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *What was the problem that led to the Jerusalem Conference?*
2. *Summarise the testimony of Peter, Paul, Barnabas, and James at the Jerusalem Conference.*
3. *What decisions were made at the Jerusalem Conference and why?*
4. *Why should we abstain from things that may be harmful to others?*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *Who spoke at the Jerusalem Conference and what were their main messages?*
2. *What were the decisions made by James at the Jerusalem Conference, and explain their significance.*



**PAUL'S SECOND
JOURNEY**

THE SECOND PREACHING CAMPAIGN

14. IMPRISONED AT PHILIPPI

“Come over into Macedonia and help us”

READING: Acts 16

OBJECTIVE

To show how God extended the hope of the salvation to the Gentiles in Philippi. Even through trial God protected His apostles as they served Him.

BACKGROUND

At the end of the Jerusalem Conference, the apostle Paul, in company with Barnabas, Judas and Silas, journeyed to Antioch. There they told the brethren of the behaviour expected of converts to Christianity. After some time, Paul determined to revisit the ecclesias he had already established during the first campaign, and together with Silas, departed for Syria and Cilicia.

GOD DIRECTS PAUL TO MACEDONIA (VERSES 1-12).

At Lystra the brethren met the young man Timothy whom Paul asked to accompany them. Timothy's father was a Greek. To avoid criticism and opposition to Timothy by the Jews Paul thought it best that Timothy submit to circumcision. Timothy proved to be a faithful companion and son in the faith to Paul. When the brethren had passed through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, the Holy Spirit directed them not to go into Asia, probably meaning not to go into what became the area of Ephesus and the seven ecclesias. That area was to the west and south of them. They then planned to travel north to Bithynia, but again God directed them away from their destination. When they reached Troas (ancient Troy), Paul saw a vision. A man of Macedonia was praying that they should come to help them in that area. Understanding that it was God's will for them to go to Macedonia, the brethren immediately sailed across the Aegean Sea to Neapolis. From there, the Ignatian Way led them 15 km inland to the first city (chief city) of Macedonia - Philippi.

LYDIA AND HER HOUSEHOLD BAPTISED (VERSES 13-15).

Philippi was named after Philip of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great. It was a colony, under Roman rule. It appears that there were no synagogues in the town, for Paul and his companions went first to a riverside, where it is recorded that “prayer was wont to be made”. Among some women who heard their preaching was Lydia, a trader, who sold a precious cloth dye. She, like Cornelius the centurion, was a devout person, and responded to the truth that was taught her concerning the things of the kingdom and the name of Jesus Christ (cp. Acts 10:2,6). After learning and believing the Gospel, Lydia and her household were baptised, and from that time, she persuaded the brethren to abide with them at her house.

A WOMAN HEALED (VERSES 16-21).

There was in Philippi a mentally disturbed woman who had gained a reputation as a fortune-teller. Men had taken advantage of the pagan people’s superstition and had demanded large sums of money from those folk who ignorantly placed faith in the woman. After hearing Paul and the brethren preaching the gospel she became interested in them and accompanied them for many days. She began to cry out that these men showed the way of salvation. This upset Paul, as he did not want the truth to be proclaimed from a mentally disturbed person. He realised that it was not good for the Gospel to be associated with fortune telling.

Finally, through the special power granted him by the Holy Spirit, he cured her mental disability. Because the woman no longer suffered delusions, she was unable to continue her practices of fortune-telling and as a result, the men who had gained much money through her activities lost any further profit. In anger they captured Paul and Silas and brought them before the rulers in the market place. Although Paul and Silas had wrought only good and righteous works, they were brought before the magistrates, and these wicked men charged them with trouble-making.

IMPRISONMENT, EARTHQUAKE AND CONVERSION (VERSES 22-34).

Often those who preach the truth concerning Jesus suffer scorn and contempt from their fellows. Paul and Silas’ experienced this

at Philippi as the crowd joined in their condemnation. To satisfy the cries of the crowd, the magistrates stripped and beat the brethren, and ordered their imprisonment under strict security. Despite their humiliation and pain, Paul and Silas rejoiced that they were able to suffer for the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (cp. Acts 5:41).

PRINCIPLE FOR LIVING – *BE JOYFUL IN THE TRUTH*

While Paul and Silas were doing Christ's work they suffered greatly. They responded to the exhortation that Jesus gave when he said, *"blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven"* (Matt. 5:11-12, cp. 1 Pet. 4:12-14; 3:14; Rom. 12:14). In the middle of the night their faith shone forth as a beacon, as they prayed and sang praises to God. Paul knew how to be joyful in all circumstances. Later he wrote to the Philippians:

- *"Finally my brethren, rejoice in the Lord"* (Phil. 3:1)
- *"Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say Rejoice"* (Phil. 4:4)
- *"But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly"* (Phil. 4:10)

This joy was not a passing happiness, but a continuing state of mind. Paul knew that God had called Him to manifest the Father's glory to the Gentiles, and was working in his life. Such a knowledge gave him great joy that no-one could take from him. We need to find the Truth the source of greatest joy in life. The joy of the truth cannot be taken from us, even when others laugh and mock at our beliefs.

As Paul and Silas sang the prisoners heard them and so did Yahweh. God then gave a sure sign of His everlasting care (Psa. 34:7; 107:10-16; 146:1-7) by causing a great earthquake to rock the prison building, open the doors and set the prisoners free. Quickly, the jailor realised his responsibility to keep the prisoners captive, and he despaired for his life. If any escaped, his own life would be taken by the Roman authorities. Paul could see the jailor about to commit suicide in the shadows and quickly cried out to reassure him that the prisoners were all there in the jail. It was clear to the man that Paul and Silas were indeed representatives of the all-powerful God of Israel. The jailor was over-awed by God's

display of power *and* the God-fearing attitude of His servants. He called for a light and sprang in - but not in the manner appropriate to a security guard. He fell down trembling before them!

He was not so much concerned with locking them up again, but in being saved himself. He cried, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (cp. Acts 2:37; Luke 3:10). Fear led to desire and desire in turn to belief. Belief brought obedience and baptism "that same hour of the night" to his entire household. He had heard the gospel, seen the attitude of Paul and Silas, experienced the shock of the earthquake, the self-control of the prisoners who stayed rather than fled, and the charge given to him by Paul and Silas to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. He was convinced!

BASIC BIBLE TEACHING - BELIEF AND REPENTANCE NEEDED BEFORE BAPTISM

It is sometimes asked: How could the jailor and his household know enough about the Gospel to accept the responsibilities of the Truth in baptism so soon? It is obvious from his question in v.30 that he had been well acquainted with Paul's preaching of the things concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. That preaching was well known and widespread for they had been there "many days" (cp. vv.17,18,20-21). The jailor's reaction was not just an emotional response - it was based on Bible truth. God's principles do not change - unless we believe, repent and are baptised we cannot be saved (Acts 2:38; 3:19).

That night as they washed Paul and Silas' stripes they could, in effect, say, "*by their stripes we are healed*" (cp. Isa.53:5). We too can be thankful that it was through the sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ that we are given the opportunity to believe and be baptised into the hope of salvation. We have all the evidence before us that there is "*none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved*" (Acts 4:12). Let us therefore humbly believe and obey the charge given to us.

THE MAGISTRATES HUMBLLED (verses 35-40).

The magistrates were frightened when they heard of the events of that night, for they had unjustly sentenced the brethren without a fair trial. Perhaps Paul and his companions were protected by

Divine Power? Therefore the magistrates instructed the sergeants to arrange their release. When the keeper of the prison conveyed this message to Paul, he refused to be dismissed in this way. He emphasised the unjust and harsh treatment his party had been given, and pointed out their rights as Roman citizens to a fair trial and some respect. *“Let them come themselves and fetch us out”*, he demanded (v.37). When they received this message, the magistrates’ fear increased. They realised that now they would be unable to secretly explain away the embarrassing incident. Now they were forced into an open show of apology. In this way Paul was able to humble the civic authorities in Philippi, and so safeguard the little ecclesia from further similar persecutions. The magistrates would remember the lessons of those hours for a very long time. *“God is not mocked”*, and His Word shall accomplish that which He pleases (Gal.6:7; Isa.55:11). After the magistrates had personally released the company, apologised and asked them to leave the city, they went to the house of Lydia, where they met again with the ecclesia. Paul and Silas spoke words of comfort to the remaining brethren and sisters and departed from Philippi, whilst Luke and Timothy continued their ministrations to the believers in that place.

SUMMARY AND LESSONS FOR US

- Paul instructs us to be followers of him, even as he followed Christ (1 Cor.11:1). He said he desired to conform to the sufferings, death and resurrection of Christ (Phil. 3:10,11). This episode in his preaching campaigns highlights how closely he conformed to the Christ and we should gain inspiration from his devotion.
- When we consider the conversion of Lydia and the jailor, we remember that Jesus said, *“No man can come unto me except the Father which hath sent me draw him”* (John 6:44). We should be very thankful for the opportunities God has given us to learn His Truth. It is our only source of hope in this troubled world, and we should draw near to Christ while the Father is calling.
- Paul and Silas suffered for the sake of righteousness in a very real way in Philippi. Their singing and praise showed that they were happy despite their persecution. Peter recorded: *“But and*

if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye..." (1 Pet.3:13). We can take encouragement from the experiences of the early disciples and be sure in the knowledge that God will never forsake His children.

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

"Paul, the Apostle" (W.H.Boulton) Ch.9

"The Story of the Bible" (H.P. Mansfield) Vol.13, pp.136-154.

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *Explain how Paul was guided to Philippi.*
2. *What attitude did Paul and Silas take to their imprisonment at Philippi?*
3. *Describe the conversion of the Philippian jailor.*
4. *How can we be joyful in the Truth when life is tough?*
5. *Why are belief and repentance needed before baptism?*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *Give an account of Paul's preaching in Philippi.*
2. *Describe the events leading up to Paul's imprisonment in Philippi.*
3. *Describe the conversion of Lydia and the jailor at Philippi.*



15. RESPONDING TO PAUL'S TEACHING - THESSALONICA, BEREIA AND ATHENS

"His spirit was stirred in him"

READING: Acts 17

OBJECTIVE

To show how the truth was eagerly accepted by humble people of Berea but refused by the "wise" philosophers of Athens. This provides an important lesson for us today.

BACKGROUND

A feature of Paul's stay in Philippi was the cruel treatment he received from those who opposed his preaching. There followed a pattern of persecution that was becoming firmly established. After leaving the ecclesia at Philippi, the apostle journeyed to Thessalonica and Berea, and finally to Athens.

MIXED RECEPTION IN THESSALONICA (verses 1-10).

Thessalonica was situated about 150 kilometres south-west of Philippi. It was an important city of Macedonia, and was the site of the region's Jewish synagogue. Here, for three sabbaths, Paul reasoned with the Jewish and Gentile converts, teaching that Jesus was the Christ. Some of the Jews and many of the local Greeks were persuaded by his reasoning. But those Jews who refused to accept the Truth conspired against him. Overcome with envy, they gathered a mob and promoted a riot. The mob moved to the house of Jason where the brethren had been staying. Jason was dragged before the rulers and was accused of showing hospitality to troublemakers. It was only after the authorities had taken security from the brethren that they were allowed their freedom, and in view of the tense atmosphere, the ecclesia quickly sent Paul and Silas off to Berea that night.

ENCOURAGEMENT AT BEREIA (verses 10-15).

Upon their arrival at Berea, Paul and Silas began their preaching work at the Jewish synagogue. The Jews of the area showed a

keen interest in their testimony, and “*searched the scriptures daily*” to determine whether it was accurate. Consequently, many of them, as well as many of the Greeks, believed. In fact, we would all do well to follow their example of reading the Bible day by day. When we do that we will soon find the wonderful harmony and clarity of the Truth. Believing it to be the ONE hope we can then gladly accept it like the believers at Berea.

Paul was again forced to flee. The angry Jews of Thessalonica heard the success of his work in Berea, and pursued him there to continue to stir up trouble. Perhaps Paul was in need of help at this time, for we read that some brethren accompanied him to Athens (v.15), and returned with his request that Silas and Timothy join him as soon as possible. It was in this time of stress and difficulty that the apostle began a most challenging involvement with the pagans at Athens.

DRAMA AT ATHENS (verses 16-34).

Athens, named after the goddess Athena, was the centre of learning in the fields of science, literature and art in the ancient world. It grew up around the rocky hill called the Acropolis (the highest point of the city), on top of which was built a magnificent temple called the Parthenon dedicated to Athena. Its citizens knew much about many subjects but were completely ignorant concerning Jesus Christ. Initially Paul was alone as he waited for Silas and Timothy to arrive. Paul was so upset by the shocking idolatry practised by the Athenians, that he immediately began to discuss the death and resurrection of Christ with the Jews and God-fearing Gentiles. Without thought for his personal comfort or safety, the apostle argued with the passers-by in the market place every day. Soon there were attracted to his audience, philosophers who had devised theories about creation and life. There were two dominant groups of philosophers in Athens at the time, each with different ideas about the world. They were the Stoics and the Epicureans.

- **Stoics** stood apart from worldly things and develop peace of mind. Their aim in life was to accept fate, to be proudly independent of the society and endure its evils.
- **Epicureans** professed that the gods were not concerned with mankind. Accordingly the Epicureans pursued all manner of pleasurable activities in an attempt to satisfy their desires. For practical purposes they did not believe in God at all. Their teaching was simple - “*let us eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die*”.

The preaching of Paul confused these believers in the immortality of the soul, for he taught them of a Saviour and the resurrection. They had not previously heard of either, and some of the audience apparently mistakenly thought that Paul was speaking of new gods. In order to know exactly what Paul was preaching they took him and brought him to “Areopagus” or Mars Hill, where judgment was to be made.

PAUL’S DEFENCE OF THE TRUTH (verses 22-31).

Paul welcomed the opportunity to expound the truth and expose the folly of the false religion of the Athenians. As he stood on the hill, a panorama of Athens lay before him. Wherever he looked Paul saw the temples, idols, and altars of the city. Before him, towering above on its pedestal on the rock of the Acropolis, was a bronze colossus of the goddess Minerva, armed with spear, shield, and helmet as the champion of Athens. The massive pillared temple, the Parthenon, stood magnificently by, built in honour of the Greek goddess, Athena Parthenon, the Greek goddess of wisdom. It was as though the city of idols was challenging Paul to state his case. Paul took up the challenge.

- **Verse 23** He began by referring to their religious “devotions”. He had seen, he said, evidence of their worship in the form of shrines. It was to one of these that he drew particular attention. Upon it were inscribed the words “TO THE UNKNOWN GOD”. It was his intention, said Paul, to make known to them the previously “unknown” God.
- **Verses 24 -25** Contrary to the theories of the philosophers, Paul stated that God had made the world and everything therein. He was Lord of heaven and earth. He ruled in the affairs of the nations and had determined the outcome of the world’s affairs, but He remained separate from man’s ways. He was not to be found in “temples made with hands,” or worshipped by people offering things of human need. God, taught Paul, was the Maker of all things, was in need of nothing, and in fact sustained all mankind by His Spirit. He is the One who gives life and breath to all living creatures.
- **Verse 26-27** God created Adam, so that all nations have a common origin. It is God that controls all creation, has organised the times of nations and the boundaries of their countries. He has given every man an opportunity to search for Him. Although He is distinct from man’s ways, God is

willing that all men should come to a proper understanding of Himself.

- **Verse 28-29** God is not, explained Paul, far from us, for we are indeed His children. Greeks had understood this fact, for two of their poets had written of man's relationship with God (v.28). If then God made us it did not make sense that man could represent God in things of his own craftsmanship. In this way Paul taught his listeners that worshipping idols was the wrong way to worship the true God of Heaven.
- **Verse 30** While it was true that God did not hold ignorant people responsible to judgment, He now required that men should repent. Now that the Lord Jesus Christ had made known the character and purpose of God, men no longer had any excuse.
- **Verse 31** He went on to say that as Christ had conquered the power of sin and had been raised from the dead, so he would come again to judge the world. The certainty of the judgment was guaranteed by God's faithfulness in resurrecting Jesus. That fact alone, argued Paul, should make men obey Him.

BASIC BIBLE TEACHING - *RESPONSIBILITY AND JUDGMENT*

All human beings who know and understand God's will are accountable to Him, whether they like it or not. The Bible often speaks of this knowledge of God's will as a light shining into the darkness of human society and human hearts (see for example John 1:5-9; 2 Cor.4:3-6). When we know and understand God's will, we are required to obey it, whether we have been baptised or not. This principle is reinforced by many Bible quotations such as John 12:44-48; 15:22; Acts 24:22, 25. People across the ancient world had been in darkness, but now that Paul had brought the light they had a responsibility to respond.

NOT MANY WISE MEN BELIEVED (verses 32-34).

Despite the rejection of the gospel by the majority, some believed. Amongst these few was Dionysius, the Areopagite and a woman called Damaris. Dionysius was a member of the tribunal that heard Paul. The power of the Word was sufficient to change this man's attitude of initial hostility, one of belief and acceptance. It was as if the judge got off the bench and joined the prisoner in the dock! His conversion was a triumph for the truth for no one could judge

in the Areopagus who had not first borne the office of the Governor of the city, and was held in high esteem for his intelligence and good conduct.

Unfortunately his case was an exception - the response was poor. The preaching of the cross had been a stumbling block to the Jews and now it proved to be foolishness in the eyes of the Greeks; but God is wiser than men (1 Cor.1:17-31). The reception of the Truth in the Western world today is very similar to the Athenians. People are philosophical; they love to hear some new thing and they have time to fritter away in listening to all kinds of ideas. The ideas of the Word of God such as a resurrected Christ are foolishness to them, just as in Paul's day.

PRINCIPLE FOR LIVING - IGNORE WORLDLY PHILOSOPHY

There were many on Mar's Hill, who, like people today, thought they had superior wisdom. They had no need for God. They were independent and not answerable to anyone. Paul's teaching of the resurrection involved reliance upon the great Creator. Many scoffed at the words of the teacher, others put the matter off to some other time. It is to be expected however, that "not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble" will receive the gospel (1 Cor.1:26). We do well to ignore worldly philosophy and reasoning which puffs people up with pride. We need to be careful when reading school books and listening to school teachers that we are not accepting a message of human reasoning which is opposed to God.

SUMMARY AND LESSONS FOR US:

- ☞ A small number of both Jews and Greeks believed Paul's teaching at Thessalonica. The unbelieving Jews stirred up a riot forcing Paul to leave Berea.

- ☞ The Berean Jews were more noble and searched the scriptures to see if Paul was preaching the truth. Many believed, both Jews and Greeks, but Jews from Thessalonica caused trouble and forced Paul to flee to Athens.

- ☞ Paul was disgusted by the idolatry in Athens. He was interested to find an altar to “the unknown god”. Before the notable philosophers on Mar’s Hill, Paul taught that the God who was unknown to them was actually the creator of the world and all mankind. His purpose is to send His son, the Lord Jesus Christ, back to the earth to judge the world in righteousness.
- ☞ Knowledge brings responsibility. Not only the Athenians, but all of us who have heard of God’s offer of salvation through faith in Christ have a responsibility to respond.
- ☞ The so called wise men of Athens thought Paul’s teaching was foolishness. Dionysius and Damaris did respond.

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

“Paul the Apostle” (W.H.Boulton) Chapter 11

“The Story of the Bible” (H.P.Mansfield) Vol.13, pp.155-168

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *What lesson can we gain from the attitude of the Bereans to the scriptures?*
2. *How is the example of Dionysius and Damaris an exhortation to us today?*
3. *Why should we avoid worldly philosophy?*
4. *What is the Bible teaching concerning responsibility?*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *Describe the mixed reactions to the preaching of Paul at Thessalonica and Berea.*
2. *Describe the city and the people of Athens in Paul’s day.*
3. *Outline Paul’s speech to the Athenians and its effect on the people.*



THE THIRD PREACHING CAMPAIGN

16. RIOT AT EPHEBUS

“So mightily grew the Word of God and prevailed”

READING: Acts 19

BACKGROUND

Paul courageously presented the Truth at Athens with a somewhat depressing result. He moved on to Corinth, where the gospel of salvation was better received. Paul lived and worked for 18 months with Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18). On his return to Jerusalem Paul passed through Ephesus, stopping there to enter a synagogue where he reasoned with the Jews, as was his custom (Acts 18, 19). Paul promised to return. He sailed to Antioch from where he had set out on his second missionary journey some three years before (Acts 15:40).

BACKGROUND TO EPHEBUS.

Life Ephesus, on the shores of the Aegean Sea, was a thriving, cosmopolitan, seaport town. The climate was mild, the air pure and sweet, and the region was noted for everything that made for softness and luxurious living. The people were friendly and refined, but loved luxury, music, dancing, elegant clothing, festivals, and whatever else was pleasant to the flesh.

Commerce It was the commercial centre of Roman Asia. It was the principal harbour for shipping from Italy and Greece. It lay at the end of the caravan route with the East, and well-made roads connected it with the interior. The city was wealthy and prosperous, and a population from many nations flocked there to share its opportunities, among them a Jewish group large enough to have their own synagogue (Acts 18:19, 26; 19:8).

Wonders Ephesus was a university city. Its people included many of the wise of this world; but its glory was the magnificent temple of Diana, once described as the First Wonder of the Ancient World. The image of the goddess Diana was supposed to have fallen down from heaven, and mysterious symbols inscribed on the idol were

used as a charm to heal. The study of these symbols was an elaborate science and many books were compiled about it.

THE REBAPTISM OF JOHN'S DISCIPLES (verses 1-7).

Paul set out about AD. 55 on his third preaching campaign and arrived back at Ephesus. His first encounter was with twelve new disciples. Paul perhaps realised something was wrong for he asked them: "*Did you receive the Holy Spirit since you became believers?*" (v.2). They answered, "*We have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit*". Paul's doubts were confirmed. They had only heard of John's baptism. They were ready to accept the full truth so Paul explained that the Messiah John had taught them about had come. Salvation was available now by believing the gospel of salvation and being baptised into the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (Mark 16:15-16), for there was no other name "*whereby they might be saved*" (Acts 4:12). So Paul re-baptised them "*into the name of the Lord Jesus*". After their baptism, Paul gave them the Holy Spirit and they began to speak in foreign languages and prophesied (v.6). With Paul, they formed a strong foundation on which the new ecclesia in Ephesus could grow.

TEACHING THE TRUTH (verses 8-20).

After speaking for three months in the synagogue with boldness, Paul was forced to leave because of the anger of the Jews. Taking his disciples with him, Paul moved his daily discussions to the school of Tyrannus. He was so effective that after two years of teaching and special miracles, the whole population of the Province of Asia - Jew and Greek - had heard of the Gospel of God (v.10). Since Ephesus was visited by many from other centres of Asia, every city throughout the area was affected by Paul's teaching. Although Paul had never visited them, ecclesias grew up in places like Colosse, Hierapolis, Laodicea (Col. 1:6,7; 2:1; 4:12,13).

As well as preaching the gospel, Paul had the power of the Holy Spirit, and he did wonderful miracles to prove that what he said was the truth of God's Word. God in this way did "special miracles" by Paul. Even "*handkerchiefs and aprons*" from Paul's body removed people's illnesses and seven false Jews who thought they could cure people simply by using the name of Jesus Christ were shown to be wrong, and shamed for their deception.

At last some of the people could see the worship of idols was very wrong. Many false teachers and magicians (priests of the old Persian religions), changed their ways and followed the Truth. They were so convinced that they burned their books on magic - books valued at 50,000 pieces of silver (or 50,000 days wages - millions of dollars in today's money).

PRINCIPLE FOR LIVING - *ENTHUSIASM*

The secret to Paul's success was his constancy and enthusiasm in the work. He told the Ephesian elders that he had been with them "at all seasons" (Acts 20:18). He had worked hard to teach them the gospel *every* day, every week, for three years. He had no "time off" to please himself. He taught publicly every day, probably from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. during the time when the school room was empty. Then he taught them in their own private homes (Acts 20:20). He had kept nothing from them but told them all he knew of God's purpose.

Paul was so motivated by God's love that he wanted to give all his effort to please His God. He valued the Truth so much that Paul wanted to tell all men and women of the greatness and love of the God of Israel.

THE OPPOSITION OF DEMETRIUS (verses 21-27).

The Ephesians were convinced that Diana was pleased by the worship of small idols kept in the temple or in the homes of the devotees. They were believed to bring good luck and so were carried about for extra protection. Most of these small idols were of precious metals, which created a large industry to provide the metals themselves and the craftsmen to fashion them. One of the most influential men in the idol making business was Demetrius. He claimed to be interested in Diana he was more interested in his own wealth.

Demetrius was roused to speak against Paul's message was that there existed only one true God who had power over all men. The people were learning from Paul that Diana and her magnificent temple were useless. He called together the craftsmen and spoke of the obvious fact that since Paul had begun preaching there had been a steady decline in the sales of their goods. He, very cunningly claimed - for the benefit of those bystanders who were devotees of

Diana - that this meant that the goddess Diana herself was being neglected.

THE RIOT (verses 28-41).

Shortly, both the true devotees and the greedy merchants began to cry; “*great is Diana of the Ephesians*”. The noise and commotion soon spread throughout the city, causing much confusion. Great thronging crowds rushed to the enormous theatre which could hold more than 50,000 spectators. So chaotic was the scene, that many were caught up in the frenzy, not even knowing why they were there (v.32). Gaius and Aristarchus, being recognised as Paul’s companions, were dragged along to the theatre. Learning of their peril, Paul resolved to make his way to the theatre, but was held back by friends and even leaders of the city. They told him that he couldn’t hope to calm the crazed mob.

Some Jews at the scene tried to put a speaker forth. They chose a man by the name of Alexander, but the crowd recognised him as a Jew, and not a devotee of Diana, and yelled all the louder. In fact, their frenzy was so great that they shouted, “*great is Diana of the Ephesians*” for two hours. Eventually, the shouting ceased long enough for the town clerk to attempt to address the crowd. The main points he made were:

- all believers and worshippers of their goddess knew her image had been a gift from the god Zeus, and was well preserved in her temple.
- Paul’s work in Ephesus had never included insulting Diana, or trying to obtain wealth belonging to her temple.
- the Romans prided themselves on a system of court justice and a rule of law, and Demetrius and his friends should use the established court procedure if they felt he had a legitimate complaint.
- any further rioting could bring a charge of insurrection against themselves.

After the crowd disbanded, Paul was free to carry out his plans to work his way back to Jerusalem.

SUMMARY AND LESSONS FOR US

- ☛ God gives His faithful followers strength to live and witness to others about His plan of salvation. We have the complete message necessary to carry on the work to which Paul so diligently applied himself.
- ☛ The new brethren were prepared to publicly burn the symbols of idolatry and to turn in quiet reverence to worship the One True God.
- ☛ The idol makers were more interested in their wealth than their goddess, and religion was to them only a means of making money.
- ☛ Paul and his friends were rescued from a dangerous situation by the action of the Ephesian town clerk. We can see that this was the hand of God saving Paul for his, as yet, uncompleted work.

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

“Story of the Bible” (H. P.Mansfield) Vol. 13, pp. 187-190; Vol. 14, pp. 5-27

“Paul the Apostle” (W. H.Boulton)

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *Why was it necessary for Paul to re-baptise the twelve Ephesian converts?*
2. *Describe the effect of Paul’s preaching from the schoolroom of Tyrannus.*
3. *How did the Gospel triumph over the superstition in Ephesus?*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *Describe the ways in which the Truth became established in Ephesus.*
2. *Describe the riot at Ephesus including the following points:*
 - (a) *how the preaching of Paul at Ephesus caused a riot*
 - (b) *what happened during the riot how it was stopped*

17. PAUL'S FAREWELL TO THE EPHESIANS

"I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified".

READING: Acts 20

OBJECTIVE

Paul warned the Ephesians of those that would leave the Truth. We need to be warned to take up that hope that God has given us.

BACKGROUND

After the disturbance in Ephesus and before he returned to Jerusalem Paul went around the ecclesias gathering collections and donations for the poor saints in Jerusalem. A group of brethren were to accompany him. While in Corinth he heard of a vicious plot to capture him; so he changed his route to go through Macedonia and Troas.

PAUL SPEAKS TO THE ECCLESIA IN TROAS (verses 6 to 8)

Paul and the brethren met together in Troas for a memorial meeting. The meeting was held on the first day of the week (Sunday). It was appropriate that they should remember their Lord on that day for it was also the day that Christ rose from the dead (cp.1 Cor.6:2). Their meeting began after sundown and since Paul intended to leave the next day; we are told that they continued long into the night.

In Troas, there were many disciples who were delighted to have Paul with them and to hear from him the word of exhortation. Paul had already established the ecclesias on the basis of the commandment of Christ to follow the pattern of the Last Supper, on the night he was betrayed and crucified (cp.Luke 22:7-20). This gave them an opportunity to remember Christ and his great love and sacrifice: *"For as often as yet eat this bread and drink is cup, ye do show the Lord's death until he come"* (see 1 Cor. 1:23-29).

EUTYCHUS FALLS OUT OF THE WINDOW (verses 9-12).

In the midst of this wonderful time tragedy struck. The combination of the closely packed crowd, the smoke from the lamps, and the late night would have affected many. Eutychus, a young man, was sitting in a window. The stifling atmosphere and weariness caused him to gradually fall asleep. The young man relaxed, overbalanced, and tumbled out of the window, falling onto the ground far below. The brethren raced to him and found him to be dead, killed in the fall of three stories.

Paul stopped speaking and hurried downstairs (the stairs were on the outside of the building), and fell on the young man and embraced him. Paul knew that he had been given the miraculous power of God's Holy Spirit, and he now appealed for God's help, and the lad's life was restored. Many were crying out in tearful grief: but Paul interrupted to calm them down and restore quietness and order. "*Trouble not yourselves*", he said, "*for his life is in him*". Since there was no apparent after-effects, Paul and the others returned to the room where they had a memorial service. Paul continued to speak with them for the remainder of the night, and when morning came, he continued his journey toward Jerusalem.

PAUL GATHERS THE EPHESIAN ELDERS (verses 13-17).

After a walk of 35 kilometres, Paul boarded a ship in Assos which sailed along the coast, touching at Mitylene and Samos before reaching Miletus. From this point, Paul sent a message to the elders of the Ephesian ecclesia to come to him. He had deliberately sailed past Ephesus in order to save time in his now anxious journey, to spend Pentecost in Jerusalem, but since he had a special message for the Ephesian ecclesia, he asked the leaders to come to talk with him.

PAUL'S ADDRESS TO THE EPHESIAN ELDERS (Verses 18-38)

Paul's example to the Ephesians (Verses 19 to 21)

Paul commenced his address by reminding them of his service in Christ while in Asia. Paul had laboured tirelessly from the time he got to Ephesus – every day, every week, every month for three

years. They had all witnessed Paul's willingness to speak out even when in danger. He had left no doubts that even when rebuking some, he always had the best interests of the ecclesia at heart. He was a true shepherd of the flock.

Paul's future suffering (Verses 22 to 27)

Paul explained that the Holy Spirit was compelling him to push on toward Jerusalem, knowing that the Jews were becoming increasingly resentful and increasingly threatening in their actions toward him. He would not be sidetracked from his mission, because he realised that there would be many hardships and even prison in store for him. Jesus Christ, himself, had given Paul his commission to preach the word to the Gentiles so he had little care for his own safety - being concerned only with carrying out the task assigned to him in the best way he could.

Dangers ahead (verses 28 to 30)

Paul urged the Ephesian elders to guide their ecclesia well, since the forces of evil were already working in some areas of their ecclesial life. The dangers posed by wicked and power hungry individuals from within their own ranks was very great, and was one which they must continue to guard against. The elders had accepted a very grave responsibility when chosen by Paul, and were now to use their training to be worthy leaders of their ecclesia. He especially warned them that some of the wicked ones would be so convincing that there would be danger that some might be drawn away.

Paul and Christ's example of giving (verses 31 to 35)

By way of encouragement, Paul reminded them how he had spared nothing - not even himself - in order to preach the Truth to them. He reminded them that the prize for the faithful far outweighs any discomforts or dangers which we might experience in this life. He ended his charge to them with the encouragement... *"and now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the Word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified"* (v.32). They knelt in prayer to seek God's blessing on them all. With grieving hearts and tearful eyes, they bade Paul an affectionate and sorrowful farewell, escorting the travellers down to the ship at the wharf. We can profit from Paul's final exhortation, for his example of dedication and self-sacrifice encouraged the Ephesian elders, which can encourage us to witness to God's Truth.

Farewell (verses 36 to 38)

The spirit in which they received his message showed the love the brethren had for Paul. Firstly they said a prayer together. They cried and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him. They were deeply alarmed and saddened to hear Paul say that they would not see him again before the Kingdom age. They knew of the trials and the bitter end Paul faced, and we can understand their pleas for him to change his plans and to avoid the Jews in Jerusalem. Sadly they said farewell and Paul sailed towards Jerusalem.

PRINCIPLE FOR LIVING - *REMAIN FAITHFUL TO GOD*

If we want to hold onto the Truth which God has given us we need to turn to the record He left for us - the Scriptures. To see the difference between good and evil, we must know what the good is. To develop our characters the way God wants us to, we must study His word. With the knowledge we gain we can clearly choose the right way from the wrong - and by so doing follow the way of Jesus Christ who went before us as an example of how God wants us to live and think.

The Ephesian Ecclesia struggled and even came to the condition that Paul feared when he said, "*all they that are in Asia turned away from me*". But the example Paul left must have been remembered by some there, for Christ was later able to say "... *I know thy works and thy labour and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars.*" (Rev.2:2).

May it be that Christ will be able to say the same of us; that we labour in patience and hate all that is evil. In so doing we will have followed his own example, for of him it is written that he "*loved righteousness and hated iniquity*" (Heb. 1:9).

SUMMARY AND LESSONS FOR US:

- The unfortunate death of Eutychus gave Paul another opportunity to show the power of God.
- Paul warned the Ephesians of "wolf-like" intruders. We are still surrounded by deceitful enemies of God's Truth who are just as

eager to turn us away from the path to the kingdom as they were in the first century.

- The answer to this problem lies in reading the scriptures and being ready to give, rather than be selfish. We too need to recognise worldliness and self-importance as being evil and to remain constantly active in the work of the truth (1 Cor.15:58).

VERSE TO REMEMBER: “I have showed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

“Paul the Apostle” (W. Boulton)-Chapter 14.

“Story of the Bible” (H.P. Mansfield)-Vol. 14, pp. 27-60.

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *Why did the ecclesia meet on the first day of the week at Troas?*
2. *Describe the incident concerning Eutychus.*
3. *What dangers faced the Ephesian ecclesia as described by Paul in Acts 20?*
4. *How must we remain faithful to God?*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *Outline the substance of Paul’s message to the Ephesian elders at Miletus.*
2. *Explain the responsibility Paul declared had been given to the elders of the Ephesian ecclesia.*

18. JERUSALEM AND BONDS

“He steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem”

READING: Acts 21, 22 and 23

OBJECTIVE

To show how Paul determined to please His Father by enduring the sufferings ahead.

BACKGROUND

Paul's third preaching campaign had almost ended. He had preached the gospel all over the Roman world and had established and strengthened ecclesias wherever he went. Now he *“set his face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem”* as Jesus had done years before (Luke 9:51). He was determined that nothing would prevent him from witnessing there, despite repeated warning that tribulation awaited him.

PAUL RETURNS TO JERUSALEM (Acts 21:1-14).

After a sorrowful departure from Miletus, Paul and his companions sailed down the coast and across the Mediterranean, past Cyprus and landed at Tyre. There they remained seven days with the brethren. During their stay, Paul was again warned not to go to Jerusalem because persecution lay ahead (v.4). However, they travelled south to Ptolemais (Acre) and then on to Caesarea. At Caesarea Paul stayed at the house of Philip, who many years before preached in Samaria and Caesarea (Acts 8:5,40). While he was there a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea and enacted a prophecy. He took Paul's girdle, and after binding his hands and feet, said that the Jews would do this to Paul in Jerusalem and then deliver him into the hands of the Romans. When they heard that, even Paul's companions joined with the brethren of Caesarea in pleading with the Apostle not to go up to Jerusalem. Paul fully realised the danger ahead, and his reply (v.13) caused them to stop and think. He was not only ready to be bound, but to die also. The secret of his courage and determination was his confident faith

in God's power. He knew God would never forsake those that put their trust in Him (Psa.9:10; Phil.4:13; 2 Cor.12:9-10). Consequently, his companions, seeing he would not be persuaded, said, "*The will of the Lord be done*" (v.14).

JERUSALEM AT LAST (Acts 21:15-26).

Three days and 120 kilometres later, Paul and his companions arrived in Jerusalem to a welcome from the Jerusalem brethren. The next day, they met with James and all the elders to inform them of their preaching and to present the collection of money from the Gentile ecclesias for the poor brethren in Judaea (v.18). James and the elders glorified God because of what they heard, but warned Paul of dangers facing him. There were rumours circulating that Paul was encouraging the Jews to completely forsake the customs of the Law of Moses. This was untrue. Paul knew that it was no longer necessary to keep the law to be saved, but he did not oppose the proper use of the Law (1 Tim.1:8; 1 Cor.9:20). In order to prove the rumours false, the elders suggested that Paul join four other Jewish believers in the Temple for the purification ceremony of the Nazarite vows (see Num.6). Hoping that this would reassure everyone, Paul agreed, and made his way to the Temple.

RIOT IN THE TEMPLE (Acts 21:27-40).

When the seven days of the ceremony were almost ended, Paul was recognised in the Temple by some visiting Jews from Asia. They hated him, and so they immediately stirred up a riot. They seized Paul and dragged him from the Temple, intent on beating him to death. Fortunately the Roman captain, Claudius Lysias, heard the uproar and immediately took a band of soldiers to quell the riot. He ordered Paul to be chained and carried into the Tower of Antonia near the Temple. Meanwhile the people followed shouting, "away with him" as they had done years before with Jesus (cp. Luke 23:18). On the way up the stairs into the Tower, Paul asked the captain if he could speak to the people.

PAUL'S DEFENCE BEFORE THE JEWS (Acts 22).

Paul was given permission, and from the steps he addressed the crowd in Hebrew. The main points were:

- He was a Jew; a student of the famous teacher Gamaliel in this very Temple. Paul had lived perfectly according to the Law (v.3).
- In his mistaken zeal for God he had persecuted the followers of Jesus Christ to death (v.4).
- He told them of his trip to Damascus in detail - how he was struck down and blinded by a light from heaven. He told them how his sight was restored, of his baptism and his total change in life (vv.5-11).
- Ananias had come to him and given him the great commission to be Christ's witness to all men (vv.12-16)
- Christ had appeared to him in a vision to tell him to get out of Jerusalem and "*Depart, for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles*" (vv.17-21).

They listened quietly unto that point. But that was just too much for the crowd to take! To think that God would deal with Gentiles was blasphemy to them, so they burst forth in frantic demonstration. They shook their clothes, hurled dust into the air and shouted, "*Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live*" (v.22). The captain could not understand this sudden outburst, and so quickly ordered Paul to be taken into the castle. His intention was to extract the reason for the uproar from Paul by torture. However, Paul avoided lashings by asserting his Roman citizenship (since Roman citizens were not allowed to be beaten without a fair trial). This was the first step in a process that would eventually bring Paul to Rome. Nevertheless, Claudius Lysias, in order to find out the cause of the riot, commanded the Sanhedrin to meet and conduct an enquiry.

PAUL BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN (Acts 23:1-10).

Before the Sanhedrin Paul was confident, and said that he had lived "*in all good conscience before God*". In other words, his whole life was governed by a consistent consciousness of God's requirements. He knew God's requirements and made every effort

to obey them fully. However, the High Priest was outraged at Paul's statement, and ordered him to be smitten, contrary to the Law (Lev.19:35; Deut.25:1,2). Paul responded by prophesying, "*God shall smite thee, thou whited wall*" (v.3). Josephus records that the Jews, later murdered Ananias the High Priest, thus fulfilling Paul's prediction.

Paul then continued and divided the Sanhedrin into two groups by saying he was a Pharisee and believed in the resurrection of the dead. This caused a great uproar because the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection, and so did not support him, but the Pharisees did. As Paul was again in danger of being torn apart, the chief captain ordered the guards to remove him to the safe custody of the castle.

FROM JERUSALEM TO CAESAREA (Acts 23:11-35).

During the night, the Lord Jesus appeared to Paul (v.11, cp.18:9; 22:17), and encouraged him to maintain his faith and comforted him by the assurance that he must also defend the Truth in Rome. The next day, certain Jews gathered and, because of their hatred of Paul, made a vow not to eat until Paul was dead. To make matters worse, the powerful chief priests approved their wicked plan. What a total disrespect for God's purposes with Paul! But they had similarly acted with Christ and Stephen. They devised a scheme to assassinate him, but fortunately Paul's nephew overheard this and told Paul. When Claudius Lysias heard of the Jewish plot, he immediately sent Paul to Caesarea (where Felix was the Roman Governor), escorted by 470 soldiers. He also sent a message to Felix outlining the details of the Temple riot and the conspiracy against Paul. At Caesarea, Paul was kept in custody until his opponents arrived from Jerusalem. This is another remarkable illustration of how God overturns the schemes of men to achieve His purpose. Paul was to preach in Rome, and there was absolutely nothing men could do to upset the purpose of God.

SUMMARY AND LESSONS FOR US:

- Despite the many warnings that trouble and hardship lay ahead, Paul had sufficient faith and courage and determination to press on. He did not want to endure the bonds and afflictions

that awaited him, yet he realised that God knew best, and therefore that His will should be done. We often only do the things we want to do, but this may not always be what God wants us to do.

- ☛ Paul realised too, that God truly cares for all those that love and fear Him. Although he almost lost his life in Jerusalem, God manipulated the evil plans of men to save his life. God watches over us too, and will care for us and guide us if we put our trust in Him and obey Him.

REFERENCE LIIBRARY.

“The Story of the Bible” (H.P.Mansfield) Vol.14, Nos.2 and 3

“Paul the Apostle” (W.H.Boulton) pp.155-182.

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *What warnings did Paul receive to not go on to Jerusalem when returning from his third journey?*
2. *Why was Paul arrested in Jerusalem?*
3. *How did Paul divide the Sanhedrin when in Jerusalem after his arrest?*
4. *What caused Claudius Lysias to have Paul escorted out of Jerusalem to Caesarea?*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *Outline the events that happened to Paul in Jerusalem that led to his arrest, and show how God was directing his life.*
2. *Briefly describe Paul’s defence before the Jews as recorded in Acts 22, 23.*

19. PAUL'S DEFENCE BEFORE RULERS

“He is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before Gentiles, and Kings”

READING; Acts 24, 25, 26

OBJECTIVE

To show how Paul used every circumstance to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ.

BACKGROUND

Paul had returned to Jerusalem only to experience the hatred of the Jews who would have killed him. He was saved by the intervention of Lysias who sent him to Caesarea by night so that Felix could judge him. Like Jesus, Paul found himself a pawn in the game of politics the Jews played with Rome. He was passed to Felix, to Festus, and then to Agrippa, until finally his appeal to Caesar took him to Rome.

BEFORE FELIX (Acts 24:1-9).

Paul waited for five days under guard in Herod's palace where the governors lived. At that time Ananias the High Priest and the elders representing the Sanhedrin came down from Jerusalem to press their charge against Paul. They wanted to be sure that he was condemned this time, and brought with them a hired orator or lawyer named Tertullus, to present their case. He started by flattering Felix in a most insincere way. *“Most noble Felix”* he called him - but the opposite was the case. Felix was an immoral man, described by Roman historians as a monster of lust and cruelty. He was a very different man to the humble Paul, who was in the true sense a noble man.

Tertullus had nothing but hatred and abuse for the man in bonds. Directing his attack to side with the Roman's opposition to political or religious agitators, he accused Paul of:

- Agitating Jews throughout the world to rise against the Romans;

- Being a ringleader of the hated “*sect of the Nazarenes*”;
- Attempting to profane (or treat with contempt) the Temple in Jerusalem.

The Jews wholeheartedly agreed that these charges were correct.

PAUL'S DEFENCE BEFORE FELIX (Acts 24:10-23).

Paul began by mentioning that Felix had been a governor among the Jews for many years, and would therefore be in a better position to understand Paul's defence. Paul had only been in Jerusalem for twelve days. He had gone there after many years to worship. The Jews had not found him arguing in the temple, nor causing the people to riot, either in the synagogues or in the city. The charges against him could not be proved.

However, Paul confessed that he did worship in the “way” which they called “heresy”. But it was not heresy for he believed all the things written in the Law and the Prophets, including the resurrection of the dead. In fact, he said, because of the hope of the resurrection “*I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward God and toward men*” (24:16 RSV). The Jews from Asia who had found him in the Temple, after completing his purification ceremony, should have come to Felix if they had any charges against Paul. The Sanhedrin themselves had found no wrong in Paul except for the remark on the resurrection which divided them. “*Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day*”, said Paul. That fundamental belief was no crime at all.

Felix knew something of Judaism through his Jewish wife Drusilla, and something of the new Christian sect. It must have been obvious that Paul was innocent, but Felix did not want to offend the Jews. They were capable of having Rome remove him from his position. He adjourned the case until the chief captain Lysias should come. Meanwhile Paul was kept by a centurion and allowed to see his friends. Again the Truth triumphed over its evil opponents. We can imagine the frustrated Jews going home, full of hatred and bitterness for the man who once again had escaped their hands.

FELIX AND DRUSILLA HEAR PAUL AGAIN (Acts 24:24-27).

Paul's words had interested Felix and Drusilla and they sent for

him privately several times to hear about *“the faith in Christ”*. But Paul’s words about righteousness, the need for temperance or self control, and the coming judgment, made the evil Felix tremble, and he sent Paul away. However, he often called him back, not to learn more of the Faith but in the vain hope that either Paul or his friends might pay money for his release.

FELIX LEAVES PAUL BOUND (Acts 24:27).

Two years later Felix was recalled to Rome, apparently to answer charges of injustice and cruelty against the Jews in Caesarea. He still did what he could to please the Jews, and left Paul in prison. How typical of human nature - he forgot how Paul had impressed him. Imagine what those two long years in chains must have been like for Paul. He had been an active man, visiting ecclesias in many places, and now he was tied to one place. However, he would have used that time profitably. He would have helped the ecclesia in Caesarean by his presence, written many letters and prepared himself for the new work to come. In all his trials he saw the guiding hand of God and patiently awaited the time when he must go to Rome.

PORCIUS FESTUS (Acts 25:1-12).

Festus became the new governor in Cilicia. Immediately he went down to Jerusalem to meet the elders of the people he was to govern. Even after two years the Jews had not forgotten Paul. The passing of time had not reduced their intense hatred for Paul or the faith which he championed. They asked Festus to bring him down to Jerusalem, intending to kill him on the way, but Festus must have seen through their cunning. Eight to ten days later (v.6 mg.), Festus went back to Caesarea, and the next day sat on the judgment seat to reopen the case against Paul. The Jews had *“many and grievous complaints”* about Paul which they could not prove. This contrasted with Paul’s simple and direct denial of their charges (25:8). Festus realised that Paul was innocent, but like Felix before him, he wanted to please the Jews. He asked Paul if he would go down to be tried at Jerusalem. Paul knew what he could expect from the hands of the Jews. Asserting his innocence and making use of his Roman citizenship, he appealed to Caesar for the right to be heard by Rome’s Supreme Tribunal. This was now the means by which

he could go to Rome, rather than being kept penned up at Caesarea or Jerusalem for years. Again Divine providence rules!

KING AGRIIPPA AND BERNICE VISIT FESTUS (Acts 25:13-22).

A few days later King Agrippa II and his sister Bernice came down to visit the new governor. The King not only ruled a small part of northern Palestine but he was also an important figure in the Jewish state, having connections with some of the temple offices. His father Herod Agrippa I was the one who had killed James (Acts 12), his grandfather had killed all baby boys at the birth of Jesus, his uncle was involved with the death of Christ. What a terrible family history! Nevertheless, he was an important Jew, and was interested to hear this *“Jewish controversy with Paul”*. This pleased Festus who had nothing definite to write of Paul to the Caesar. He quickly realised that Agrippa with his greater knowledge of Jewish law might be able to formulate a charge and so rid him of this knotty problem.

BEFORE THE KING (Acts 25:23-26:29).

Agrippa and Bernice came to hear Paul with Festus, as well as all the chief men of the city. They came *“with great pomp”* - no doubt with many royal and beautiful robes, parading themselves, puffed up in fleshly self-importance. There was an enormous contrast with the prisoner in chains who had suffered great humiliation and hardship to take the gospel to all nations. Paul was an *“ambassador in bonds”* for Christ the true king. He has set us an example not to worry about the great men of this life or their vain opinions, for they are worthless in God’s eyes.

Christ told Ananias that Paul was a chosen vessel to bear his name before kings (9:15). Here was such an opportunity. On permission from Agrippa, Paul began to fearlessly proclaim the faith he had accepted. Stretching out a hand from which his chain hung, he appealed to Agrippa to listen patiently, realising that the King was conversant with all the Jewish customs and problems. Paul outlined his early life; he had lived as a very strict Pharisee, but now, he said *“I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers”* (v.6). For this reason he was accused.

This hope was based on the resurrection of the dead, because God had made the promises to the fathers of Israel, and as He is the God of the living, the fathers and the faithful must rise (Luke 20:28-38). Why should the Jews dispute the evidence of their scriptures?

Paul went on to show the reason for his conversion to Christ. He told of his violent opposition to the followers of Jesus and how he had set about to exterminate the Christians. The event that changed the whole course of his life was the blinding revelation of the risen Christ shown to him on the road to Damascus. Jesus was indeed the Messiah of Israel! Paul became a willing servant to the call of the risen Christ's that he bring the Gentiles to share in the forgiveness of sins and inheritance promised in the Hope of Israel. It was for this reason that the Jews wanted to kill him. But, Paul explained, his preaching only followed Moses and the prophets, who of course had foretold Christ's death and resurrection.

At this point Festus, amazed that an intelligent man should talk of such unusual things, could not help saying "*Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad*". Paul appealed to the king: "*King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest*". Agrippa was not prepared to commit himself to the responsibility which would come with the admission that Jesus Christ fulfilled the Old Testament prophets. He answered "*almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian*". Paul wished that everyone gathered there was the same as himself, but without his chains. We can imagine the scornful looks of some of the important men. Why should they want to be like this despised prisoner who was full of zeal for such an unusual cause. Little did they realise that Paul only of them all will be saved in the day of judgment? What then of the ambition and pride of men!

TO ROME (Acts 26:30-32).

The meeting was over. The king and the governor discussed Paul's position, and agreed that he could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar. But once freed, the Jews would not have spared him. Paul knew this, and also that he must go to Rome to further the work of the gospel, as Christ has told him (19:21).

SUMMARY AND LESSONS FOR US

- ☛ Paul witnessed to the truth fearlessly before great men - governors and kings, Jew and Gentile. He was not even afraid to show them their responsibility to God.
- ☛ The apostle had such a love for His Father and confidence in Him that he was able to look beyond the sufferings of the present, the chains, the cold dark prison, the ridicule of men, to the day of glory. We will probably never have to suffer as Paul did, but we have his example to put into practice in our lives, in all the circumstances which come upon us (2 Cor.4:16-18).

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

“The Story of the Bible” (H.P.Mansfield, Vol.14, pp.82-96

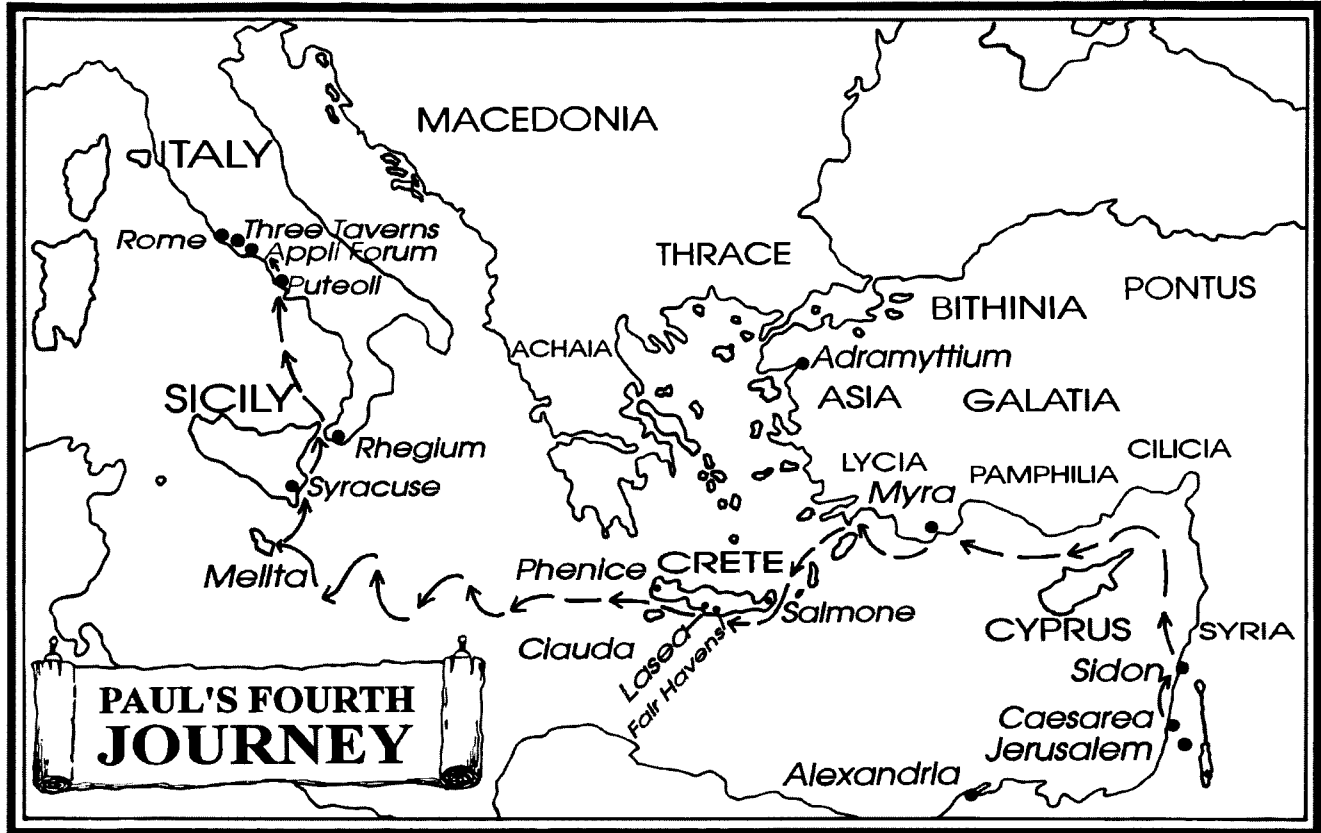
“Paul the Apostle” (W.H.Boulton) pp.176-191

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *What were the three main charges against Paul which Tertullus made to Felix?*
2. *How did Paul answer the charges made against him when brought before Felix the governor?*
3. *Why did Paul appeal to the court of Caesar after his defence before Festus?*
4. *What was Christ’s commission to the converted Paul? Show how it was fulfilled in the events recorded in Acts 24-26.*
5. *What was the hope that Paul was judged for when brought before King Agrippa?*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *Describe Paul’s defence before Felix.*
2. *Outline Paul’s speech to King Agrippa, mentioning the reactions of Festus and Agrippa.*



The Fourth Journey

20. SHIPWRECK

**“Lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.
Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God”.**

READING: Acts 27

OBJECTIVE

To show that Yahweh’s providential care is with us, just as it was with Paul to bring him to Rome.

BACKGROUND

Paul had stood before Festus and Agrippa and presented his defence against the Jewish leaders. He spoke with conviction that the Roman authorities would have released him, but for the fact that Paul had already appealed to Caesar - and so he must go to Rome.

PAUL LEAVES THE SHORES OF PALESTINE (verses 1-11).

Paul accompanied by other prisoners, under the guard of a Roman Centurion (Julius), and with his friends Luke and Aristarchus, set sail for the Capital of the Roman Empire. As the ship sailed out of the harbour of Caesarea, Paul took a last look at the land of promise - soon to feel the judgments of God upon a rebellious people.

The following day, the ship called at Sidon. In the short time Paul had been in the charge of the centurion, he had impressed him so favourably, that he permitted him to go ashore and visit other disciples, a privilege not given to other prisoners. When the journey was resumed, troubles were soon encountered. The winds were not favourable to sail directly to Myra, and so the ship had to sail slowly by the coasts of Cilicia and Pamphylia, until it arrived at Myra. There they changed ships to a larger vessel which was carrying wheat from Alexandria to Rome, and 276 people (v.37)

The winds remained unfavourable and the progress continued to be slow. Winds from the wrong direction blew until they managed to round the eastern end of the Island of Crete and eventually

lodged at a place known as Fair Havens. It was September and winter was coming on fast, a time of the year when sailing was dangerous for the ships of those days. All navigation on the open sea was usually discontinued by that time. A decision had to be made, as to whether to continue or not. The captain wanted to sail 70 kilometres to the better port of Phenice. Paul prophesied disaster if they sailed! The centurion was convinced by the Master of the ship more than by a prisoner. They decided to sail on.

IN PERIL ON THE SEA (verses 12-20).

When a gentle south wind blew, they headed toward Phenice, a port on the western tip of Crete. They had just cleared the land, when a tremendous wind of typhoon force, known as “Euroclydon” (meaning “the North-Easter”) blew the ship way off course to the south-west. As the wind whipped up the waves and drove the ship, the mariners did all they could to prevent the ship from sinking. The crew lifted the lifeboat on board. They under-girded the ship by passing thick ropes around the front of the ship and working them along under the ship and around it to stop the timbers from coming apart. They threw over-board tackling from the ship and some of its cargo to allow the ship to ride high in the water.

Day after day passed, and neither sun, moon nor stars could be seen through the stormy clouds, so they had no means of knowing where they were or in what direction they were really going. They knew that the wind was generally carrying them in the direction of the coast of North Africa and its treacherous quicksands.

GREAT FAITH DISPLAYED (verses 21-26)

In this crisis, Paul showed the sort of man he was. For many days now the sailors had laboured without proper meals, and depression had begun to settle upon all on board, holding their lives in fear. Picture the scene. Here was a ship out of control, tossed helplessly on the waves. Every hope of bringing it safely to port had been given up. The mariners were hungry and tired, worn out with their exertions.

It was in these fearful circumstances that Paul stood forth and spoke in a calm and confident manner. Read verses 21 to 26 and consider the magnitude of faith displayed by Paul. He is seen at a moment of great fear, standing forth, giving a prophecy of safety for all the ship, and exhorting the crew to “be of good cheer”. How

could Paul stand forth and be so bold in his predictions? The reason was "I believe God". He trusted completely in God to carry out His Word. Paul knew he must be a witness in Rome and nothing would prevent this, for the angel had said unto him, "*Fear not Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar*".

THE SHIP DRIVEN AGROUND (verses 27-44)

Paul in his speech showed confidence and cheerfulness, which proved to be infectious, and his words and example increased the courage of all on board. It was about midnight, on the fourteenth day since leaving Fairhavens and the ship was still drifting, when the sound of breaking waves was heard, a sign that they were nearing land. Soundings were immediately taken and they found they were in twenty fathoms of water; a little later, it was fifteen fathoms. They were rapidly approaching land, so they at once cast out four anchors and "*wished for the day*".

Lying anchored near to land, the sailors attempted to leave the ship and secure their own safety, by using the boat which they had lowered. It was at this moment of time, that Paul clearly demonstrated the influence that he had gained on the ship. Paul declared to the centurion and the soldiers that unless the sailors remained within the ship, they would not be saved (v.31). His intervention caused the soldiers to cut the ropes and the boat drifted away. We are reminded that unless we stay in the Ark of God's providing we cannot be saved.

The critical time would come in the morning, and it was necessary for crew and passengers to be prepared for it. Paul therefore besought them to partake of food, and in the presence of all, gave thanks for it (vv.33-36). As the daylight grew, and having been refreshed by the food they had eaten, the sailors attempted to beach the ship in a bay that had been sighted. As the wind drove the ship toward to shore, it struck a sandbank in the middle of the bay. There she stayed, but as the stern was buffeted by the waves, it began to break up (v.41).

The soldiers suggested that the prisoners should be killed in case they attempted to escape; for if they had, Roman discipline would have held the soldiers responsible for it (v.42). The Centurion was determined to save Paul and prevented the suggestion. Finally, some by swimming, and some availing themselves of floating wreckage, all reached land safely (v.44).

PRINCIPLE FOR LIVING – FAITH CONQUERS FEAR

In the face of a treacherous storm, Paul remained calm and ready always to speak of his beliefs. Paul demonstrated on this hazardous journey that we must learn through all the “storms” of life, even in the face of death itself, to have the same calm conviction as shown by the Apostle, e.g., “I believe God”. We can then “*overcome all things through Christ who strengtheneth me*” (Phil. 4:13).

We are all on the journey of life and our faith can be demonstrated at its best under trials and temptations. Remember that not only can we be delivered through our faith, but we, by example and strength of character, can influence others in the way of godly paths and so break down opposition to the truth.

Paul was not embarrassed about being a servant of God – neither should we be. He demonstrated his beliefs in God with such power and conviction that even the centurion obeyed Paul’s commands in a time of trouble. Such was his respect for Paul, he was determined that he should not be harmed when the other soldiers wanted to kill the prisoners. How are our characters viewed by our friends around us, as we “sail” through times of crime, immorality, and ungodliness? The crux of this lesson can be summed up in one word *Faith*. Do you understand the full meaning of this word? If not, then refer to Instructor No. 70.

REFERENCE LIBRARY

“The Story of the Bible” (H.P.Mansfield) Vol.14, pp. 96-106
“Paul the Apostle” (W.H.Boulton) pp.192-200

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS

1. *Outline what you understand by the word “Faith” and give an illustration of it in action from Paul’s shipwreck experiences.*
2. *How was Paul so sure that no lives would be lost because of the shipwreck?*

ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. *How did Paul display his faith during the journey to Rome?*
2. *In a brief outline describe Paul’s storm tossed journey from Caesarea to Malta, as he travelled to Rome to appear before Caesar.*

21. PAUL GOES TO ROME

“For the Hope of Israel I am bound with this chain”

READING: Acts 28

OBJECTIVES

We will learn how that with God’s help Paul was able to witness for Christ in Rome, even though he knew that it might mean his death.

BACKGROUND

The ship had run aground and as the waves began to break it to pieces, all on board the ship were in danger of drowning. Under the centurion’s direction, by swimming or floating on wreckage, all safely landed. However, they were exhausted and shivering with cold as the rain and bitter wind lashed them. All they desired, was shelter and warmth.

ON THE ISLAND (verses 1-10).

The island of Melita (known today as Malta) belonged to the Roman Empire, and was ruled by a man named Publius (Acts 28:7). The people of Melita showed the survivors of the shipwreck much kindness and hospitality. They helped kindle a fire to keep warm. Paul, with his usual energy, took part in collecting some wood for the fire. As he did so, a viper fastened itself onto his hand. Being superstitious, the Maltese were convinced that he must have been a bad criminal. They thought he had just escaped death from shipwreck but vengeance from the gods had finally caught up with him. Instead of swelling up and falling down dead, Paul shook off the deadly snake into the fire. God protected him. The islanders were amazed, changed their minds and decided that he was a god!

The miracle led to more. The father of Publius was very ill, suffering from a serious bout of dysentery and fever and would have died. But Paul prayed to God for power to heal him, laid his hands on him and the man recovered. News of the miracle quickly spread throughout the island, and many others who suffered from various diseases came and were cured. Paul’s kind-hearted actions can be

a lesson to us all. We cannot do miracles, but we can heed what he wrote: *“Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you”* (Eph.4:32). *“As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men...”* (Gal.6:10).

THE JOURNEY TO ROME CONTINUED (verses 11-15).

After three months they set sail again for Rome, having been supplied with all the necessary provisions from the islanders. The voyage was favourable. They landed first at Syracuse in Sicily, then touched at Rhegium, the port on the toe of Italy, and finally landed at Puteoli. There the travellers found believers who desired them to stay with them for seven days. It must have been encouraging for Paul and his two companions, to see some brethren after such a long time.

At the end of the seven days, during which there would have had an opportunity for the Breaking of Bread, they renewed the journey to Rome by road. During this time messengers went north to Rome to spread the news of Paul’s coming. At Appii Forum (about 70 km from Rome), and at the Three Taverns (55 km from Rome), they were met by some of the brethren from Rome. Paul seems to have been rather depressed, as he journeyed towards Rome. He may have heard of the cruelty of the Emperor Nero, to whom he had appealed, and who was to decide his fate. But when he met the brethren, “he thanked God and took courage!”

PAUL IN ROME (verses 16-31).

At last Rome! This was Paul’s objective – to witness to Christ in Rome. He arrived in Rome knowing that there would be additional suffering, and in the end, death. The other prisoners were delivered to the Praetorian guard, but Paul was allowed to rent a private home. Although Paul was a prisoner, and was guarded by a Roman soldier day and night, he could receive visits from his friends and others (such as Luke, Aristarchus, Timothy, Tychicus, Mark, just to mention a few), and carry out his great work of proclaiming the gospel. We can take a lesson from Paul’s great character; for in whatever situation he was found, he accepted his position, and made the best of it as he said, *“I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content”* (Phil.4:11). Often it is hard for us to accept trials that come upon us. It will ultimately be for our good

and the good of the Truth, if we as Paul, remain steadfast and faithful to the end. Though Paul was bound with a chain, yet God's word was not bound (2 Tim.2:9) and through Paul it even penetrated into the very court of Caesar himself (Phil.4:22).

He still acted on the principle of *"to the Jew first"*. So after three days Paul called the Jewish leaders together and told them of the circumstances that had brought him to Rome. The Jews in Jerusalem had accused him of being a troublemaker and an offender, and for this cause he was brought as a prisoner to Rome. He had been forced to appeal unto Caesar although the Romans had found no cause of death in him. Paul had desired to see and to speak with the Jewish leaders in Rome, that they might realise, *"for the hope of Israel he was bound with a chain"* (v.20).

BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLE - *THE HOPE OF ISRAEL*

The hope of Israel is a central issue of the gospel, and one of the key doctrines that Brother John Thomas uncovered from the rubbish of Christendom. He noted that Paul said that we are saved by the Hope (Rom.8:24). What is this hope? It is that which Paul calls the Hope of Israel (Acts 28:20). This was not some new teaching, for God had told Abraham, Isaac and Israel that the great promises would be fulfilled in their nation. Jesus had clearly pronounced that "salvation is of the Jews" (John 4:22). So Brother Thomas sat down and wrote the book *Elpis Israel* in which he explained from the Bible the great Hope of Israel. This is a distinctive part of our heritage as Christadelphians.

The leaders had heard very little of him, but knew something of his "sect", which was everywhere spoken against. A day was appointed in Paul's house, that he might explain what he and this "sect" stood for. Paul's earnestness is seen, as he expounded to the large audience that came to hear him, from morning to evening concerning "the Kingdom of God" with Jesus as its King, both out of the Law of Moses and the Prophets. Some believed, and some did not. Paul was able to summarise the reaction of the disbelievers from the prophet Isaiah (6:9-10), who had said, that *"Hearing ye shall hear, and not understand, and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive"*. They had hardened their hearts. Refusing to believe themselves, they did their utmost to stop their countrymen believing also (cp. Matt. 23:13).

When the Jews refused the Gospel message, it was opened to the Gentiles, who were willing to hear. During the two years that Paul dwelt in Rome, in his own hired house, he spoke to all who came to him of the *“unsearchable riches of Christ”*, and of the intention of God to include men and women from all races in the family of God. For *“unto the Jews were committed the oracles of God”* (Rom. 3:2) but *“the Gentiles were made fellow-heirs and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ, by the gospel”* (Eph. 3:6). As we read these beautiful epistles of Paul (Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon and Philippians), we would better appreciate their exhortational value if we pictured in our minds the figure of Paul, chained to a Roman guard, writing to his beloved brethren and sisters and earnestly discussing the Hope of Israel.

SUMMARY AND LESSONS FOR US

- ☛ Yahweh helped Paul to reach Rome so that he could preach in the capital city of the Roman Empire. This confirmed what Paul had been told by the Lord earlier, that he Paul, must bear witness in Rome of the Gospel concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 23:11).
- ☛ God cared for his servants throughout their journey, because of their obedience to His will, and their demonstration of faith and confidence in Him, even when under great peril.
- ☛ We also will receive help from God to do His will if, like Paul, we have an unswerving confidence in the truth; and always seek the Father’s guidance and counsel in our lives. Our faith will become stronger and will show itself in increased activity around the things of God, e.g., a daily interest in reading and talking about the Word of God to other young people within the Truth and to those interested in this precious *“Hope of Israel”*.

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

“The Story of the Bible” (H.P.Mansfield) Vol.14, pp.107-119

“Paul the Apostle” (W.H.Boulton) pp.199-206

“Elpis Israel” (J.Thomas) pp. 223-227

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *How did God protect Paul and through him work miracles when Paul was in Melita?*
2. *What lessons can we learn from Paul's experiences in Rome?*
3. *As the record of Acts closes, what do we find the apostle Paul doing?*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *Outline the events that occurred to Paul when shipwrecked on the island of Melita and on his following journey to Rome.*
2. *Though Paul was imprisoned in Rome, his work did not cease. What did he do whilst in Rome to further the influence of the Gospel?*



22. THE FINAL WORK OF PAUL

“I am now ready to be offered”

READING: 2 Timothy 4

OBJECTIVE

The aim of this lesson is to grasp the apostle Paul's attitude when faced with death and to be inspired to dedicate our lives to Christ in our day of opportunity.

BACKGROUND

In our last lesson we left the apostle Paul in his own hired house preaching and teaching the Gospel. He appears to have been released from prison as he expected. He made one last visit to the ecclesias leaving Trophimus sick in Miletus (2 Tim.4:20) and his cloak behind at Troas (2 Tim.4:13). He was imprisoned again, but under terrible circumstances. At the time of his first imprisonment he was confident of release and he wrote to the Philippians: “I trust in the Lord that I also myself shall come shortly” (Phil. 2:24). But the end had now come. He wrote to Timothy: “I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand” (2 Tim.4:6).

PAUL AT THE END OF HIS COURSE.

The great apostle Paul, the bondsman of Jesus Christ, who for approximately 30 years had been a chosen vessel bearing Christ's name before Gentiles, kings and his fellow Jews, was now ready to be offered. The time of his departure from life was at hand. He had fought a good fight, finished his appointed course, and had kept the Faith (2 Tim.4:6-8).

Christ had told Ananias that he would show the newly converted Paul, *“how great things he must suffer for my name's sake”* (Acts 9:16). Now, some 30 years later, an aged man in his 60's, Paul, could look back over those years, see his commission as an apostle and teacher and say *“For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed”* (2 Tim.1:12). And in another place, *“I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound. Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes,*

that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory” (2:9,10).

We cannot fail but be impressed by the example of dedication to Christ set by the apostle Paul. We marvel at his determination, despite colossal odds, to fulfil his commission. We wonder at his calm acceptance of trials, for he saw them as sharing Christ’s sufferings. But it is his love for his brethren and sisters that is one of his most outstanding attributes. As he said to the Corinthians, *“whether we be afflicted ... or comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation” (2 Cor.1:6).* That love motivated his daily care for all the ecclesias (11:28; cp.vv.23-27).

PAUL’S FINAL IMPRISONMENT.

When we review the situation in which the apostle Paul found himself at this second, and final, imprisonment we start to realise how perilous his position was. It is approximately 4 years after the events recorded in Acts 28, in the approaching winter of AD 66. Persecution of Christians had broken out at the instigation of the crazed Emperor Nero in an attempt to absolve his guilt in the great fire of Rome. It is recorded that “a very great multitude” of Christians was put to death. Some were crucified; some were disguised in the skins of beasts and hunted to death with dogs; some were wrapped in robes impregnated with flammable materials and set on fire at night, that they might serve to illuminate Nero’s gardens and circus arena where he sadistically rode around as a charioteer gloating over the agonies of his victims.

This was the man to whom Paul had to appeal. Nero was a cruel, obscene, utterly depraved Emperor. The mere fact of professing Christianity was sufficient to justify immediate arrest and execution. Into that hazardous situation, Paul made haste, breaking off his preaching tour and going to the aid of his imperilled brethren and sisters. He was quickly arrested and thrown into a cold, dank dungeon with winter approaching. It was known as the “Well Dungeon” at the foot of the Capital and was infamous for its chill vault and oozing spring.

Only Luke was with him. His other companions had either been sent away or had deserted him. Demas, once faithful, left him to seek the world’s pleasures for a season. One of his closest friends, Onesiphorus, had courageously sought him out and refreshed him.

But it seems that he, too, was arrested and put to death for associating himself with the prisoner (see 2 Tim. 1:16-18).



PAUL AND TIMOTHY.

Paul had a special attitude to all his companions in spreading the gospel. His strongest relationship was with Timothy. Now as he awaited his final defence he yearned for the presence of his “son in the faith”. Right from the days of Lystra, more than 15 years before Timothy had come to fully know Paul’s doctrine, persecutions and afflictions (2 Tim.3:10,11; Acts 14:19-20). They made a deep impression on the young brother’s mind. From a sheltered, God-fearing home environment, Timothy was thrust into the rigours of missionary work. Having a good report by all the brethren of Galatia he became a valuable visiting speaker on the Macedonian

campaign. He became one of the founders of the ecclesias of Philippi and Thessalonica. He became a representative of Paul visiting the Thessalonians, the Corinthians and the Macedonians, and he was left in charge at Ephesus. These things show that in a sense, he was a true son of his father. That love in the bonds of the Truth between Paul and Timothy was based on a mutual willingness to serve. There was a comparability, a like-mindedness, in their response to the gospel's demands. Paul saw Timothy as an extension of himself. He speaks as follows:

- "Timothy my workfellow" (Rom.16:21)
- "my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord" (1 Cor.4:17)
- "he worketh the work of the Lord, as I also do" (1 Cor.16:10)
- *"I have no man like-minded, who will naturally care for your state . . . ye know the proof of him, that, as a son with the father, he hath served with me in the gospel" (Phil.2:20, 22).*

While in prison Paul longed for Timothy's presence. No one could console him more than his own "son in the faith". There was a fatherly longing to see once more the face of Timothy his beloved "son". But Timothy was at Ephesus. Paul wrote asking him to come quickly. Would he arrive too late? And would Timothy's reserved and retiring disposition shrink back from the perils awaiting him at Rome? We do not know, but the unanswered questions underscore the physical and mental hardships of Paul's final days. Thirty years of tremendous energy spent in Christ's service saw the apostle now almost exhausted in mind and spirit, facing the executioner's sword at the whim of a madman!

We can therefore appreciate the personal nature of Paul's last letter, the 2nd Epistle to Timothy. We are reading the final urgent appeals of an aged apostle to his son in the faith, Timothy. Here is his dying counsel. His final thoughts are carefully chosen and deliberately stated. With little time left, important issues would not be trifled with. The opportunity to write of interests close to the heart was slipping away.

We are twentieth century readers of that letter. Just as he earnestly appealed to Timothy to be his faithful successor, so too, he asks us to carry on in Christ's service, upholding the calling of the Gospel handed down to us. This letter will exhort us to carefully guard this precious Truth, that was once entrusted to Timothy, and is

now entrusted to us. Paul is appealing for our response to stir up the gift of God in the greater use of our various capabilities in the advancement of the Truth.

PAUL'S ATTITUDE TO DEATH.

Though Paul was facing death, what was the apostle Paul's attitude to his calamity?

2 Tim. 4:6-8: His life was about to be closed by a violent, cruel death. This prospect might here cast a shadow of gloom over his imprisonment, but he rejoices that the crown of righteousness is his reward. The bearer of grace is approaching. The crowd of witnesses is cheering him on for his last public testimony.

2 Tim. 4:16-18: Though he was going to be the apparent victim of his enemies and Nero's capricious judgment, the apostle was going to be delivered. He was going to be freed - free from trials, anxieties, and sorrows. His mortal life would end. He would rest in sleep and rise at a future day to the glory of Christ's reign.

2 Tim. 1:9-12: Though death was still a very real threat, death itself was abolished, rendered powerless by the Gospel which had brought life and immortality to light. As he had faithfully carried out his stewardship in being a preacher, apostle, and teacher, so he was confident that Yahweh would faithfully keep his promise in the day of reward; though he suffered, he was not ashamed. It is a faithful saying that saw its expression in the life of Paul, for he was persuaded that, "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him"(2:12). He indeed loved the appearing of his Lord. Despite the almost intolerable situation, Paul believed that he could "do all things through Christ who strengthened him" (Phil. 4:13). With the glory beyond the suffering then, who could separate him from the love of Christ? (Rom.8:35-39). Nero, with all the might and power of imperial Rome at his disposal, could not do that.

SUMMARY AND LESSONS FOR US:

- ☉ For 30 years Paul endured all things for the elect's sake with the motive that "they may also obtain the salvation". We are called to the service of the Gospel and entailed in that is a service to our Master and to our brethren and sisters.

- Paul and Timothy are outstanding examples of a combined service to Christ. They were “yokefellows” having a like-mindedness in their care for the ecclesias at the expense of personal comfort.
- Paul’s attitude to his final imprisonment and impending death is truly remarkable. He encourages us to seek, too, the crown of life and to love the Lord’s appearing.

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

“Story of the Bible” (H.P.Mansfield) Vol. 14, Pages 115-161

“Paul the Apostle” (W.H.Boulton) Chapters 22, 23

“2nd Timothy” (A. Hill) C.S.S.S. Study Notes

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *What was Paul’s attitude to death?*
2. *Where was Paul when he wrote his 2nd Epistle to Timothy? Who was with him? Who had deserted him and why? What did he want Timothy to do?*
3. *How does the example of Paul help us to witness for Christ today?*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *Describe the relationship between Paul and Timothy.*
2. *Describe the situation of Paul’s final imprisonment in Rome.*
3. *Paul’s 2nd Epistle to Timothy was written just before he was condemned to death. What does this epistle teach us about:*
 - a) *his attitude to death;*
 - b) *his relationship to Timothy; and*
 - c) *how we should use our time and talents today?*

Preparing for Christ

23. BAPTISM

“He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved”.

READING: Romans 6

OBJECTIVE

To show the importance of baptism.

BACKGROUND

The call to be baptised was made to thousands in the first century as the apostles presented the good news of the Kingdom to both receptive and hostile audiences. Their faithful and often courageous preaching produced a response in the hearts of many in Jerusalem, Judaea, Samaria and into the uttermost parts of the earth. Let us now see what is accomplished by the important act of baptism.

WHAT IS BAPTISM?

The English word “baptise” comes from a Greek word “baptiso” which means “to dip” or “to plunge”. It was used to describe the dyeing of a garment by immersing it in a fluid to create a change of colour in the garment. By baptism a believer of the gospel submits to a simple yet humbling act of great significance. His or her immersion comes as the next step after a good confession of faith. Sins are washed away and the believer rises up from the waters leaving behind the old way of life, and steps forward determined to glorify God in their new way of life.

BAPTISM ESSENTIAL FOR SALVATION

Jesus declared “*he that believeth and is baptised shall be saved*” (Mark 16:15-16). Jesus taught Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, that a man must be born of water (baptism) before he can enter the Kingdom of God (John 3:5). Just think how many times in the book of Acts we have seen the importance of baptism. A few examples are:

- When the people heard and believed the gospel taught by Peter

on the day of Pentecost, they were moved to confess their repentance and cry out, *“what shall we do?”* The answer was *“be baptised!”* And about 3,000 people obeyed that answer.

- When the Samaritans believed the things concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptised, both men and women.
- When the believing Ethiopian eunuch saw *“a certain water”* and said *“see here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptised? And Philip said, if thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest”* (Acts 8:36,37). They both went down into the water, and the eunuch was baptised. They came up out of the water indicating that a full immersion had taken place.
- Cornelius was told that despite his many good works there was one important thing that he lacked. He was a devout man, one who feared God, who gave much alms to the people, who always prayed to God - and yet, something was missing! Upon Peter’s teaching of the gospel of the Kingdom and the salvation accomplished in the death and resurrection of the Son of God and upon the sign of the Holy Spirit sent by God, Peter could see that no man could *“forbid water”* (v.47). He *“commanded them to be baptised in the name of the Lord”* (v.48).

PRINCIPLES SHOWN IN EDEN.

When Adam and Eve sinned, God provided coats of skins to cover their shame and nakedness. He had rejected their own attempt to cover themselves with figleaves (Gen. 3:7). If God was going to accept them, to reconcile them, then it had to be on His own conditions. And those conditions involved the *“shedding of blood”* to provide their covering. We are later told that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins (Heb.9:22). So the life of an animal was given in order that Adam and Eve could find acceptance with God. They couldn’t save themselves. They were being taught that they needed a redeemer who could overcome where they had failed and so reconcile them to God.

THE SACRIFICE OF CHRIST.

God has appointed a new means of reconciliation. He has appointed the shedding of the blood of His Son, as a perfect, unblemished offering,

as the means for us to obtain the forgiveness of sins. The Lord Jesus Christ was the spotless “Lamb of God”, foreshadowed in Eden and in the Law, through whom our sins may be covered (Isa.53:7). It was the one, perfect offering to take away the sins of the world, securing the ultimate salvation of all the faithful, of all ages. Since God has decreed that this is the only way for sinful man to be forgiven of his sins and have a hope of eternal life, it is vital for us to submit to His appointment. This requires us to undergo a symbolic death, burial, and resurrection in the waters of baptism, just like the actual sacrifice of Christ. Our baptism is patterned on his experiences and from that time on our life “in Christ” should be patterned on his life.

THE PREPARATION FOR BAPTISM.

The simple yet vitally important act of baptism is “*the answer of a good conscience towards God*” (1 Pet.3:21). That conscience develops from instruction in the fundamentals of the Gospel. The person who becomes aware of their need for salvation carefully studies these first principles of the Apostolic Faith so that he or she may have a proper grasp of the Truth and the new life that follows baptism. We require this of a candidate for baptism because of the confusion, error, and liberal thinking concerning this means of salvation that exists in Christendom today. But this requirement is also made because of the example of the apostles recorded in the Word of God, when care was exercised to ensure that repentance and belief were both present before baptism. With our willingness to comply with Christ’s command and the instruction of the apostles must come a thorough appreciation of the Truth to which we commit ourselves. That Truth must be grasped, loved and nurtured as a rock-solid foundation upon which we can build our lives. This life long commitment will see us witness for the Truth, build up the Faith in the ecclesia and personally prepare for our Lord’s return.

CHRIST THE PATTERN (Romans 6).

The apostle Paul shows that baptism is a symbolic burial following the pattern of Christ’s death and resurrection. It is a burial or a putting to death of sin and its habits. The old way of life which was a slave to sin is discontinued and left behind as the believer rises from the water to a “newness of life”. So that what can be described as a negative action in cutting off a service to sin becomes

a positive action of service to God. Paul compares this newness of life to Christ's resurrection (Rom.6:4; Col.2:12, 3:1). The baptised person "lives unto God" by rejecting the re-entry of sin and shows a desire to glorify God by putting into practice in daily life the characteristics which are of God and which were shown in the sinless life of Jesus Christ. Baptism changes our allegiances. To be identified with Christ is not a part-time profession but rather it is for life! The baptised person is responsible to God since he or she has been bought with "the precious blood of Christ" and as such there is a life long commitment to God and Christ as our Redeemer. To be baptised is to enter a position of grace and privilege. With baptism comes access to God in prayer through the mediator Christ, and fellowship with the Brotherhood of Christ throughout the world.

The act of baptism is therefore the most important step made in a person's life. By God's appointment it should not be entered lightly or without recognition of its responsibilities.

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

"Elpis Israel" (J. Thomas) pp. 53,135,188-209

"Key to the Understanding of the Scriptures" (H.P.Mansfield)
Lesson 7

"Christendom Astray" (R. Roberts) Lecture 17

"Christadelphian Instructor", questions 62, 63

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *What is baptism?*
2. *How essential is baptism for salvation? Your answer should include examples from the times of the apostles.*
3. *Show how Christ was the one, perfect offering fulfilling the types demonstrated in Eden and in the Law.*
4. *How can we prepare for baptism?*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *Show why we must be baptised and explain its significance.*
2. *What are the important steps that must be taken:*
 - a) *before baptism?*
 - b) *after baptism?*

24. HOW TO BE READY FOR THE COMING KING

“Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God”

Reading: Ephesians 6

OBJECTIVE

The aim of this lesson is to explore ways which will help us to be prepared for the Lord so that we might have an abundant entry into the Kingdom.

BACKGROUND

Over 1900 years have elapsed from the time when the apostles went out into all the world and preached the Gospel. But though separated by so many years, our days are no less dramatic. The world is about to experience the return of Christ who caused the Roman world to be “turned upside down”. We have considered the enthusiasm and courage of the apostles and of the early ecclesias as an example to us who live at the time of a greater manifestation of God’s power. The question confronting us is: “How can we prepare ourselves for Christ’s coming?”

A CHANGE OF DIRECTION

Paul taught the Ephesians that the servant of Christ has a new relationship and cannot walk in the way of the world. True servants of Christ “henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk” (4:17). In their former life they were “dead in sins”, but baptism into Christ brings about a change of relationship: they are “quickened (i.e. made alive) together with Christ ... raised up together, and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ” (2:5-6). With this new position come responsibilities. In chapter 6 of Ephesians Paul shows us how we should develop our lives to please God; and develop the armour of God to be ready for Christ when he comes. One of the important things we need to learn is submission. Paul taught children to submit to their parents and servants to their masters.

CHILDREN AND PARENTS (Eph. 6:1-4).

In Ephesians 5, Paul wrote, “Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children” (5:1). There is a Divine family, in which Yahweh is the Father and we His children (3:14-15). Every family is expected to be a replica of Yahweh’s family. When Paul says, “obey your

parents in the Lord”, he is concerned with the proper family relationship between parents and children. What should be the attitude of children to parents? The answer is, “Obey your parents in the Lord”. In a family where Christ is honoured, the willing obedience he gave his Father will find reflection in the attitude of children to parents. Christ’s Father’s loving care and concern for him will be seen in the parents’ concern for their children. Children are to honour their parents because their parents in turn honour their Father. The family is the foundation unit in a society that honours God. Family life must be preserved at all costs.

SERVANTS AND MASTERS (Eph. 6:5-9).

In the Roman world “servants” were bondslaves and considered as property in the Roman world, to be used or abused by their masters. The same principles apply to us when we have a job or to our teachers at school. As followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, we should render honest and loyal service to our earthly masters. Christ will accept honest service done to an earthly master as service done to him. Whatever we do then should be done “as to the Lord” (Col. 3:22-25).

THE WARRIOR ARMS FOR THE BATTLE (Eph.6:10-20).

When a person accepts Christ, they are choosing a way of life that many people oppose. Even harder they find that they are fighting against their natural tendencies. Even before you are baptised you will have felt this conflict between what Christ commands and what you and the people around naturally want to do. Hence life becomes a struggle which Paul likens to warfare (cp.2 Tim. 2:3-5). The disciple fighting this warfare needs the protection of “spiritual” armour and weapons (cp. 2 Cor.10:2-6).

Paul encourages us to “be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might”, and to “Put on the whole armour of God” (6:10-11). The armour was to be complete, so that all parts of the body would be protected in the battle. The enemy is called “the devil” and is identified as the principalities and powers, both religious and political (6:11-12). Therefore the enemy which the believer in his spiritual warfare is to fight consists of the political and religious institutions of this world, which are responsible for disseminating laws and teachings opposed to God.

As Paul wrote this letter, he was chained to a Roman soldier whose

armour suggested the spiritual counterparts he describes (vv.13-18). Altogether, there are seven components in the equipment of God's warrior - five pieces of defensive armour, one offensive weapon, and one for communication. The order in which they are stated is also important.

THE DEFENSIVE EQUIPMENT:

1. The Girdle of Truth (Eph. 6:14).

The military belt was used to brace the armour tight to the body, to cover the two parts of the breastplate where it joined, and to support weapons, such as daggers and short swords. There would have been disarray without it, for it was essential for freedom of movement and efficient action. "Truth" is like that - God's Word is the foundation and source of our spiritual development (John 17:17; 15:3).

2. The Breastplate of Righteousness (Eph. 6:14; Isa.59:17).

The breastplate, or coat of mail, was in two parts - one reaching from the neck to the waist, and the other from the waist to the knees. It covered the heart and protected it from injury. The righteous laws of God dwelling within us protect our hearts and minds (Psa.19:7-14). This love of righteousness will protect us from the temptations of the "devil". Of Christ it was prophesied, "Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness" (Psa.45:7).

3. Shoes of the Gospel (Eph.6:15; Isa.52:7; Rom.10:15).

When Israel was about to leave Egypt, they were commanded to eat the Passover with their feet shod. This showed their readiness and desire to leave Egypt with its sin and slavery, and to go and possess the promised land. "Preparation" signifies "willingness, readiness". We must always be ready to proclaim the gospel and show willingness and enthusiasm for the work of the Truth. The gospel of peace is the good news that will at length restore peace and unity to all mankind. This will only occur when the Lord comes and causes all men to submit to the Truth (cp.Eph.2:14-17). We must spread that message today so that in the kingdom we might complete the work begun now.

4. The Shield of Faith (Eph.6:16).

The shield described was the large, oblong shield, curved to cover the whole body. It could be turned to deflect the enemies' arrows from any direction. Faith provides a protective covering for the

spiritual qualities represented by the warrior's armour, i.e. truth, moral integrity, and willing activity. While faith guards us, the missiles that would otherwise cause injury fall harmlessly aside. "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith". (1 John 5:4).

5. The Helmet of Salvation (Eph.6: 17; Isa.59:17).

The helmet protected the head, from which directions flowed to co-ordinate the whole body. The "head" of our "body" is the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph.1:22,23). In Isaiah 59:17, Christ is said to have "put an helmet of salvation upon his head". For the ecclesia to do the same is to "put on Christ". The defensive equipment of the saints is never effective unless Christ, the head and saviour of the body, is in control (cp.Eph.5:23). His commandments must be affectionately obeyed.

THE OFFENSIVE EQUIPMENT:

1. The Sword of the Spirit (Eph.6:17).

The "offensive warfare" committed to the ecclesia is the preaching of the gospel. Armed with "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" and clothed with the heavenly armour provided, the soldier of Jesus Christ is able to go on the "offensive" by preaching the gospel.

This warfare is not carnal but involves the realm of the mind and ideas; the gospel challenges the values and purposes of all that hear it (cp.Eph.3:9-10; 2 Cor.10:3-5). Before this can take place the Word of God must be known and understood. Then it becomes sharp and effective in the hands of the disciple (Heb.4:12). This is the result of diligent study, careful reading, meditation, and prayer.

COMMUNICATIONS EQUIPMENT:

1. Prayer (Eph.6:18-20).

While this is one of the most important aspects in the life of the believer, it is often forgotten. Imagine the plight of a soldier cut off from headquarters and fighting alone! Unless communication could be re-established the fight would be lost. But granted the help and guidance of prayerful contact with God, hope may be sustained and victory obtained. But there is a need to be alert, "watching thereunto with all perseverance". Moreover we must co-operate with fellow soldiers; Paul draws attention to this idea by making

known his own needs in this regard (6:19-20).

Thus the soldier of Jesus Christ needs **defensive** and **offensive** equipment in his warfare, as well as to **communicate** with the Father in all things.

LESSONS FOR US:

- In the midst of a permissive society, the saints of God must stand aside from the world.
- To fit themselves for the coming Kingdom, disciples must learn to “submit one to another” in marriage, in the family and at work.
- As soldiers of Christ, disciples must equip themselves with truth, moral integrity, willing activity and the protection of faith, using Christ as the guide and goal of their life.
- Thus protected from the missiles of the enemy, they must take the offensive and go forth fearlessly to proclaim the gospel.
- They must never forget the power of prayer.

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

“The Letter to the Ephesians” (J. Carter) pp.141-153
“Ephesians” (J.Knowles)

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *How do children show submission to parents and teachers?*
2. *Why does the baptised person need the whole armour of God?*
3. *Why is the Word of God described as the “sword of the Spirit”?*
4. *What are the responsibilities of parents and children towards each other, as mentioned by Paul in Ephesians 6:1-4?*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *Describe in detail the spiritual warrior of Ephesians 6.*

THE SPIRITUAL WARRIOR

Ephesians 6:10-20; Isaiah 59:16-17

SWORD OF THE SPIRIT— THE WORD OF GOD

The sword (Greek—Machaira, a short sword) was the only OFFENSIVE piece of armour worn by the warrior. Being a "short sword", it could only be used in close combat. It demonstrates that we must be proficient in our handling of the Word of God — 2 Cor. 10:4-5; Heb. 4:12.

BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

The Breastplate (Greek—Thorax) consisted of two parts; one covering the front of the body and the other the back. It guarded the heart and other vital organs frequently regarded as the seat of the EMOTIONS. It represents RIGHTEOUSNESS, and the two parts of the Breastplate answer to the two aspects of Righteousness:—

1. **Imputed** Romans 3:22-26; Psalms 32:1-2.
2. **Manifested** (in faith and love) 1 Thess. 5:8.

LOINS GIRDED WITH TRUTH

The Girdle (Greek—Zoma) went about the loins and served to brace the armour tight to the body. It represents TRUTH, which is firstly a MENTAL condition (1 Peter 1:13) and is essentially the foundation upon which our spiritual warfare is based—John 18:37.

FEET SHOD WITH THE GOSPEL OF PEACE

This illustrates the TRUTH IN ACTION. It is reminiscent of Isaiah 52:7, which Paul quotes in Romans 10:15.

HELMET OF SALVATION

The Helmet (Greek—Perikēphalaia, from peri "around" and kephale "the head"). In Thess. 5:8, it is styled the HOPE of Salvation. Paul states in Romans 8:24-25, that we are SAVED by THE HOPE.



SHIELD OF FAITH

The Shield (Greek—Thureos) was a large oblong shield used for heavy combat. It covered the whole forepart of the body, and being constructed of wood covered with hide, was particularly suitable for extinguishing "fiery darts" fired by the wicked. This symbol represents the TRIAL OF FAITH which each saint must endure before his character can be perfected (1 Peter 1:7).

"PUT ON THE WHOLE ARMOUR OF GOD"

25. SIGNS OF CHRIST'S NEAR RETURN

"Blessed is he that watcheth and keepeth his garments".

OBJECTIVE

The promise of the return of the Lord will be fulfilled soon, and all the earth will be filled with the Glory of Yahweh. Our confidence in the certainty of these events is based on the clear signs of the times described in the Word of God. This lesson is designed to encourage a watchful anticipation of the events in the world, so that as the world continues to decline and become increasingly wicked, our hearts and minds might be turned to the things which are from above.

THOSE WHO WAIT, WATCH

It is around 2000 years since the Lord Jesus Christ ascended into heaven, and the angels that were on the Mount of Olives promised the assembled disciples he would come "in like manner" (Acts 1:11). Since that time, down through the ages the faithful have waited patiently for the Lord to return. (2 Thess.3:5, James 5:7, cp. Romans 2:7-8) An important part of that patient waiting is to watch.

What are we supposed to be watching for? We should be watching for the fulfillment of the signs that God has caused to be recorded in His Word. In 1 Thessalonians 5:6, Paul exhorts that we should "watch and be sober". The context shows that it is about the events that are to occur in the earth (see v.1). The Lord Jesus Christ also encouraged those that followed him to be keen observers of the "signs of the times". In Matthew 16:1-4, he berated the Scribes and the Pharisees, for being able to forecast the weather for the next day by the sunset, but being unable to understand the signs of the times.

The use of the word "sober" shows what frame of mind we should have when we watch. It means to have self control, or not to let our thinking to take us in ways that are not acceptable to God. In a way, it is like keeping a watch on ourselves, that we do not become distracted and caught up in the world. This is confirmed by the words of the Lord in Revelation 16:15: "Blessed is he that watcheth and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they

see his shame”. Notice how the idea of watching is associated with the idea of keeping of garments. This is telling us that those who watch the signs of the times are also striving to keep themselves unspotted from the world.

Both ideas are connected. If a person is watching and can see signs that Christ’s return is near, then his interests will not be on the other things that are around. The greater the interests we develop outside of the Truth, the more our hearts and minds can become so preoccupied that we will fail to see the development of those signs which are clear signposts that the day of the Lord is approaching. In Hebrews Paul says that we should exhort “one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.” To be able to **see** “the day approaching” we must be watching. In Luke 12:37 the Lord says: “Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching.”

Therefore, a watchful person is observing the signs of the times. More than that, they are watchful that they are not absorbed into the things of the world, through our associations, activities and appearance, so that our attention is not taken away from watching for the return of the Lord.

PROPHECY - THE WATCHMAN’S GUIDE.

Peter declares that “we have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed” (2 Peter 1:19), which is a clear reference to the many Old Testament prophecies that provide the basis for watching the sign of the times.

There are four main roles of prophecy which shows how important it is, and why we would do well to take heed:

- To declare God’s Purpose (Deut.18:18; Jer.1:9; Ezek.2:1; Acts 3:21-25)
- Encourage faithfulness to God’s Ways (2 Chron.15:1-8; Acts 13:40-41; Hebrews 1:1-3)
- Confirm the certainty of God’s Plans (Matt.1:20-23; 4:14, 8:17; 12:17)
- Provide Signs for the future (Matt.12:39; 24:12; Rev.1:1-3)

We are living in an age where the New Testament is the preferred section of the Bible by many who claim to follow Christ, and the Old Testament is rarely read. The true follower of Christ will read

the Old to understand the New, and not ignore the importance of the prophecies which God has caused men of old to record.

THE RETURN OF THE JEWS

There are countless prophecies in the Bible that tell of the return of the Jewish people to the land that God had promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The most amazing is that which was spoken by Moses. Even before the Children of Israel had returned to the Land from their captivity in Egypt, he prophesied that they would be scattered and then return yet again (Deut.30:1-3). History confirms that this happened. Almost 1,500 years later the Roman Armies swept through the land of Israel “as swift as the eagle flieth” (Deut.28:49-50) and the people of Israel spent almost 2000 years wandering the world in fear of their lives, just as Moses had predicted. (Deut.28:65-67)

However, in 1948 the Land officially became the home of the Jewish people, and since then millions of Jews have returned to their land. Ezekiel saw this in a vision about 600 years BC. In Ezekiel 37, in a vision, he saw a valley full of dry bones, and the bones came together. They were then covered with skin and flesh and they become a people. Just as the dry bones in the valley eventually became living breathing bodies, so did the people of Israel. They were just like the dry parched bones that Ezekiel saw in the vision. After 6 million Jews had been killed by Hitler, and millions more had no homes, no possessions and little family as a result of their terrible persecution. They were as good as a dead nation. However, God was true to His Promise and the Jews returned back to their homeland, where they dwell today.

How can we be sure that the vision described in Ezekiel 37 relates to the dreadful sufferings and wonderful restoration of the Jewish people? We can be sure because this chapter along with many others which contain prophecy are interpreted by the prophet who penned the words in the first place. Consider verse 11: “These bones are the whole house of Israel”. There is no mistake. The vision concerned the restoration of the fortunes of the nation of Israel. It was these words that provided the basis for John Thomas, in *Elpis Israel*, to predict that the Jews living in dispersion would return to their homeland before the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Even in more recent times, 1967, a prophecy of the Lord Jesus Christ was fulfilled. In Luke 21:24 he said that there would come a time when Gentile domination of the city of Jerusalem would end. Of course at the time he was speaking of what is known as today as the old city of Jerusalem. Since 1948 the old section of the city had been in Arab hands, including the last remnants of the wall which surrounded the Temple, known as the Wailing Wall. However, on 8th June in 1967, in the Six Day War, Israel captured the old city - ending almost 2000 years in Gentile hands.

So not only are they back in the Land promised to Abraham, Issac and Jacob, from the death camps of Nazi Germany, but they possess the gates of the old city of Jerusalem, the City of David. Sadly they think that they have achieved all this through their own might and ingenuity.

THE RISE OF GOG

In the very next chapter of Ezekiel, Chapter 38, we are given details of another prophecy given to Ezekiel by God. In this chapter we find that the Jews are living in the Land “at rest” from their wanderings (v11, compare Deut.28:64-67) dwelling “safely” (v 8, 11).

Safety is probably the last word to describe the land of Israel, which is probably one of the more dangerous parts of the Earth to live in today. However, the word for “safely” can mean “careless, confident” (Strong) or “with confident mind” (Thayer). It is translated “boldly” (Gen.34:25) and “secure” (Judges 8:11). So Ezekiel is describing a people dwelling in a very confident state of mind, confident in their own ability to be able to withstand any enemy, which is very much the case that we see today.

This confidence will be short lived. The chapter describes the assembly of a number of nations, whose purpose will be to invade the Land (v.4, 9, 15). This host comprises nations described in vv 2, 5-6, which can be identified with the nations that stretch across Europe and Asia, from present day Russia in the East to France in the West.

A major military campaign of this magnitude will not go unchal-

lenged by the other nations of the world. This is described in v.13, when a maritime trading power and its allies ask “Art thou come to take a spoil?”.

These are remarkable words. In recent times we have seen the nations across Europe and Asia become more closely aligned through the European Community and other organisations, and the United Kingdom and the USA together with many of the English speaking nations in the West becoming more closely affiliated.

Therefore, the conditions where there will be two major blocs or groups of nations are occurring before our eyes. At no other time has this situation occurred in history. Now those nations that have been aligned with the West, in particular France and Germany, are moving closer politically and economically to the former Eastern communist nations, especially Russia, and shunning the UK, USA and their allies.

The finale will be the personal intervention of God into the conflict that will happen in the Middle East, by the sending of Jesus Christ back to the Earth as promised on the Mount of Olives. So the very place that he ascended to heaven, will be the very place where he will be revealed to the world as the Universal King.

THE LAST DAYS

Whilst the expressions “last days” and “latter days” are used often in scripture in prophecies related to the movement of the nations, there is also an application to the rapidly declining moral conditions in the world. (2 Tim. 3:1-4) This confirms the link that was discussed earlier between the ideas of watching and keeping ones garments unspotted. Just as time ran out for the immoral generation in Noah’s era, so the clock is just about to strike twelve for the present degenerate world we have to live in - but should not be part of.

The person who is watching the movements of the nations through the eyes of God’s prophetic word is all too aware that the return of the Lord Jesus Christ is imminent, and that to fall victim to the entrapments and lures of the world so close to the His Coming will cost the Kingdom, and be a tragedy.

Consider the characteristics that Paul prophesied would be normal in the last days:

- **“Disobedient to Parents”**: a breakdown of family bonds, trust and respect
- **“Unthankful”**: people who are self interested and self serving, lacking in appreciation of what has been done for them by others and in particular God and His Son.
- **“Unholy”**: disgusting practices, language and thinking
- **“Without natural affection”**: essential the breakdown of the love of each other, which can be seen in the breakdown of standards, morals and relationships.
- **“Trucebreakers”**: failure to keep promises in marriage, the family and in business.
- **“False Accusers”**: those who would tell lies about others for personal gain
- **“Incontinent”**: people who lack control, failing to exercise moral restraint
- **“Fierce”**: vicious angry people who do not care who they physically hurt or injure
- **“Despisers of those that are good”**: people who heap scorn on those that are trying to maintain high personal standards and integrity based on the principles of the Word
- **“Traitors”**: dishonest men who cannot be trusted.

As the events in the world serve as clear signposts of the near return of Jesus, how important that it is then to guard against any of these practices to become part of our lives.

Are you making yourself ready for the biggest ever change to the world? Or are you going to perish with those who blindly refused to accept God's Ways and drowned in the flood waters that gradually rose around the Ark - just as God said?

Even so come quickly Lord Jesus.

LESSONS FOR US

We know that Jesus will return very soon because of the signs relating to:

- ☉ the return of the Jews to Israel
- ☉ the return of the old city of Jerusalem to Jewish hands

- ☞ the rise of Russia
- ☞ the formation of national alliances across Eurasia
- ☞ the formation of a Western bloc lead by the US and UK
- ☞ the crash of world moral and social values

The imminent return of Jesus Christ, means that we must review our personal standing with Him and prepare for the great day.

REFERENCE LIBRARY

“Elpis Israel” (J. Thomas) - Part Third, Chapters 3,4,5.

“Ezekiel’s Prophecies of the Restoration” (H.P.Mansfield) pp.67-82

“The Story of the Bible” (H.P.Mansfield) Vol 14 pp.116-139

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS

1. *Explain the importance of the return of the Jewish people to the fulfilment of Bible prophecy.*
2. *Tell what Ezekiel described would happen with the formation of national alliance and how this is coming to pass today.*
3. *Describe the link between watching world events and keeping ourselves unspotted from the world?*

ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. *Review the lesson and create a list of the signs that Christ will return, and find a quote that will support each sign.*
2. *Describe the prophecy in Ezekiel 37 and how it pointed to the restoration of the Jewish people to their Land.*
3. *What does the near return of Christ mean to you on a personal basis?*