

The Good News of the Kingdom

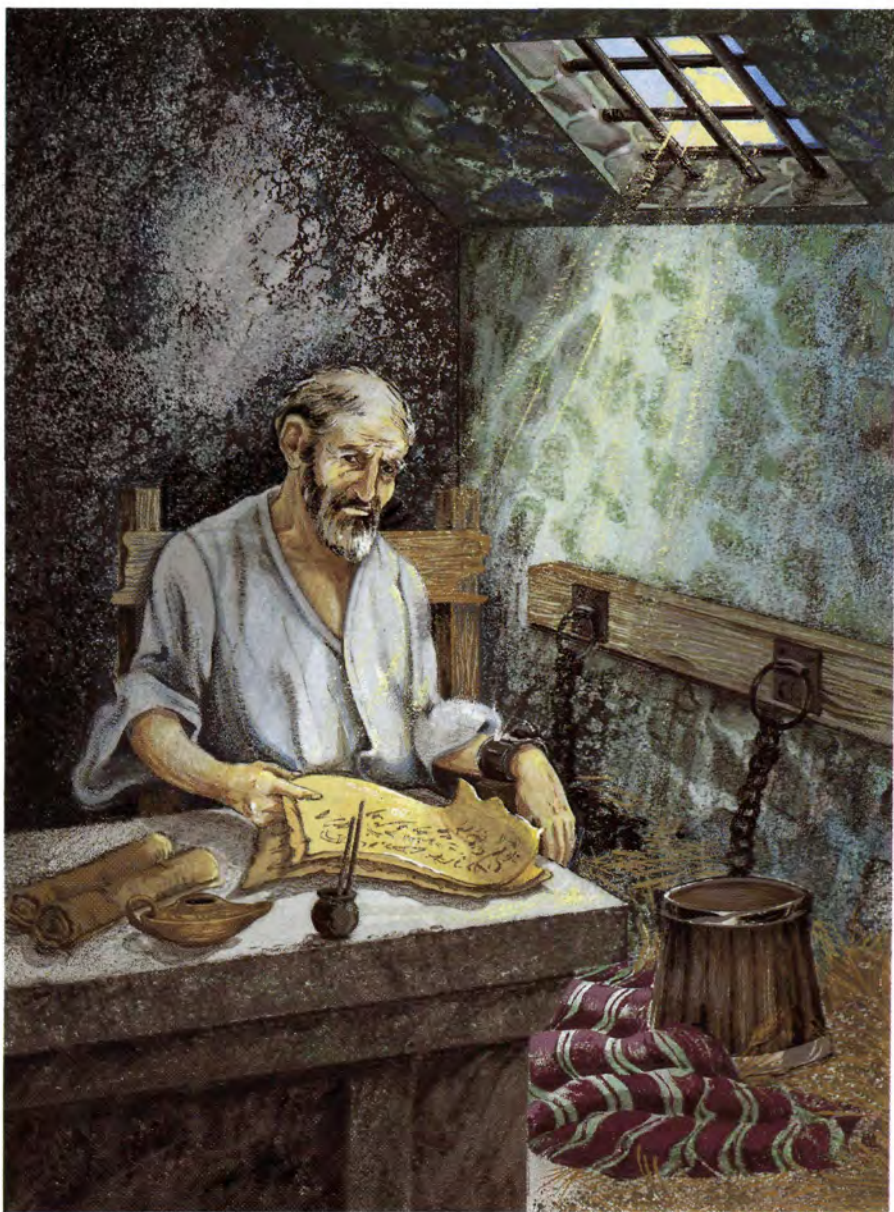


SENIOR NOTES — 15 Years and over

STAGE FIVE OF FIVE STAGES

CHRISTADELPHIAN SUNDAY SCHOOL ASSOCIATION
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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

CHRISTADELPHIAN SUNDAY SCHOOL ASSOCIATION

SENIOR NOTES — STAGE 5

FOREWORD

This series of lessons completes our studies of the purpose of God as revealed in His Word. In Stage 4 we contemplated the “Word made flesh” and saw how the Lord Jesus Christ revealed the ways of God without sin, and so was able to open the way of salvation to all those who would walk in his footsteps, Jew or Gentile. In this stage we shall consider the work of the apostles as they carried the knowledge of God’s saving grace in Christ to the ends of the world. Thus the series is entitled —
“THE GOOD NEWS OF THE KINGDOM”.

We shall be impressed with the forthright attitude of Peter and John in the face of the opposition of the ruling authorities, and as we seek for an explanation of their zeal, we shall be convinced that they were indeed eyewitnesses of the risen Lord. The speeches of Peter, Stephen and later of Paul (Acts 2, 3, 7, 13 and 17), receive detailed analysis for they provide us with basic instruction as to what our preaching today should consist.

The central figure of the series is the Apostle Paul, once the implacable enemy of Christ, but after conversion, his greatest witness and follower. It is difficult to imagine how there could ever be a more convincing witness to the Truth of the Gospel of Christ than this apostle. His forsaking of all that formerly he held dear, his initiative, his determination to surmount obstacles, his sacrifice and love of the brethren, all testify to his great faith in Christ and will inspire us to follow him.

The last lessons briefly set forth some basic principles and give a short history of the gospel from the apostolic age onwards.

It is the earnest hope of the Committee that the lessons will develop faith in Christ in the hearts of the readers. May the Lord find when he comes a band of faithful disciples in the earth such as those he left, zealous and faithfully witnessing to the great truths they have “learned and have been assured of”.

The Committee, Christadelphian Sunday School Association

CHRONOLOGY OF ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

	A.D.			A.D.	
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 Samaria 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 3 years in Ephesus - Acts 19
	35	Conversion of Paul - Acts 9		56	
EMPEROR CALIGULA	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	
	40		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	
EMPEROR CLAUDIUS	42	Truth spreads to Antioch - Acts 11:19-21	63	Trial & Acquittal	
	43	Barnabas sent to Antioch - Acts 11:22-24	64		
	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	66		
	46	James executed ; Peter imprisoned and released - Acts 12	67	Imprisoned at Rome - 2 Tim 4 2nd trial and execution	
	47	Paul embarks on 1st Journey to Cyprus, Galatia and Lycaonia - Acts 13 & 14	68		
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	49	Return to Antioch - Acts 14:26-28	70	Fall of Jerusalem	
	50	Conference at Jerusalem - Acts 15			

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Section 1

THE WITNESS TO CHRIST IN JERUSALEM AND JUDEA

When Jesus was led away to be falsely tried and crucified, all seemed lost. His disciples forsook him and fled (Matt. 26:56). The stone rolled across his tomb. Only the disappointment remained. But then, three days later, he arose from the dead, and what seemed failure became success that changed the course of the whole world.

The beginnings of this change lay in the commission which the risen Lord gave to his apostles: “Go ye therefore, and teach **all nations**” (Matt. 28:19). But before the gospel could be extended to all nations, it was necessary that it be preached to the Jews at Jerusalem and Judea. The first section of our lessons covers this initial phase of the apostles’ work — how they waited at Jerusalem until they received power from on high; how thousands became obedient to the faith following the impact Peter made at Pentecost; how the disciples stood fast in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship against the vicious opposition of the Jewish ruling class; and how Stephen died under the stones of the Truth’s opponents.

1. ASCENSION AND APOSTLESHIP

“And ye shall be witnesses unto me . . .”

The book of the Acts of the Apostles is a success story for the Truth. It relates how the Gospel spread in stages from Jerusalem to Rome, from Judea to the utmost bounds of the Roman Empire. In it we read how the convictions of the apostles enabled them to go forth with courage and proclaim the saving grace of God in Christ. We find them surmounting all kinds of obstacles in their zeal, and from their example we shall gain inspiration to do likewise.

In this lesson we shall look at Acts chapter one, but before doing so it will be good to have a general look at the book.

Acts 1

FACTS ABOUT THE BOOK OF ACTS

1. Analysis

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”

2. Authorship

Luke is the accepted author of Acts. This is shown by the way it refers to Theophilus, the person to whom Luke addressed his gospel (Luke 1:1-4), and this in a context which shows that the writer of Acts had already written a record of the ministry of Jesus Christ.

Luke’s authorship of the book seems confirmed by the use of the term ‘we’ at various parts relating to Paul’s journeys (e.g. 16:10-13; 27:1-7), showing that the author was a close companion of Paul (cp. 2 Tim. 4:11).

3. Important Events Stressed by Repetition

In writing his inspired account, Luke is concerned with important events and allots his space accordingly. Some matters he considers of such importance that he repeats them two or even three times.

Paul’s Conversion is recorded three times (Chaps. 9, 22 and 26). Why? Because of its significance in spreading the Gospel throughout the world. Paul was transformed from the most bitter and hostile opponent of Christ to his most powerful advocate and greatest follower. A miraculous change had taken place. No one could deny this. His work was now to take the gospel to the Gentiles, and in so doing to write epistles which form a large proportion of the New Testament. This transformation of Paul is one of the great proofs of the resurrection of Christ, for Paul’s conversion was based on the fact that he had seen the risen Jesus.

The Conversion of Cornelius is recorded twice (Chaps. 10 and 11). Why? Because here the Divine Seal is placed upon the inclusion of Gentiles in the Commonwealth of Israel, thus nullifying once and for all time Jewish prejudice and sense of exclusiveness.

The Decrees of the Jerusalem Conference are recorded three times (15:20, 28-29; 21:25). These played an important role because they placed the Law in its proper perspective, and allowed Jews and Gentiles to abide in the same ecclesia peaceably. The Jew could no longer compel the Gentile to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses, while at the same time Gentiles had to concede on a number of issues to accord with ingrained Jewish feelings.

Each of these matters was essential for the success of the work given to the apostles. It is notable, too, that a significant proportion of Luke’s writing is devoted to the speeches of the apostles. Peter’s speeches are prominent in the first part of Acts, while those of Paul form much of the last half.

JESUS’ FINAL WORDS TO THE APOSTLES (Acts 1:1-8).

The work of the apostles was essentially the continuation of a work begun by the Lord Jesus (Acts 1:1; Heb. 2:3). If the work was to be carried forward it was essential that its ambassadors be well-instructed in the gospel and full of conviction. That this might be the case, Jesus spent

forty days with the apostles after his crucifixion. They had each witnessed his death upon the cross, so when they SAW him alive and HEARD him speak to them, they became such powerful advocates of the Messiahship of Jesus of Nazareth that none could gainsay or resist them. The witness of EAR and EYE became the foundation of their message (cp. 3:15; 4:20; 5:32; 22:15; 1 Jn. 1:1, 3).

The Lord taught them “the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” as an essential part of the gospel message (v.3; cp. Acts 8:12). It is important for us to understand that Christ is coming and that his Kingdom centres around the restitution of Israel and the promises to Abraham (v.6; Matt. 19:28; Gal. 3:27-29). For centuries the “hope of Israel” (Acts 28:20) has been buried under the false philosophies of man. We are privileged not only to know these things, but also to be eye-witnesses of the return of the Jews to the land of Israel, a necessary step in the Divine purpose prior to the Lord’s return. It is obvious that the Lord’s teaching about the Kingdom involved the restoration of Israel from the question which the apostles asked: “Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” Their question concerned the **time** of this restoration. The Lord told them that the exact time was reserved by the Father, but did not correct the nature of their question. It is plain then that after 40 days of instruction the apostles understood and knew that the “Kingdom of God” would be upon the earth, not heaven, and that it involved the restitution of the twelve tribes.

In order to assist the apostles, Jesus had promised them Divine assistance. Upon his departure they would not be as orphans (Jn. 14:18 margin), but the Father would send forth the Holy Spirit to teach them and bring all things to remembrance. Thereby they would be enabled to “reprove the world of sin, righteousness and judgment” (Jn. 14:16; 16:7-13). They were to remain in Jerusalem that this baptism with the Holy Spirit might take place. The special power of God, or Holy Spirit, is not available today, but its completed work, the New Testament, is available (refer Lesson 2).

THE ASCENSION (Acts 1:9-11).

After 40 days, Jesus led his disciples out from Jerusalem to the Mount of Olivets. After he had commanded them to preach, and promised them the Holy Spirit, he blessed them and was taken from them and ascended into heaven (vv. 8-9; Lk. 24:50-51). With wondering eyes they beheld as he went and two angels, aglow in white apparel, explained that although he was departing yet he would surely return, precisely as he went. Their words are full of solemn emphasis and they contain the foundation of the hope of the Bible: “This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven” (v.11). Our hope remains the same: we wait for the Lord to come as he went: bodily and visibly, literally and personally. The apostles should not have been so amazed for they had been told many times that he would go away (Jn. 14:28; 16:16-17), and Psalm 110:1 plainly declared that he would ascend to the right hand of the Father, and later come again to

make his enemies his footstool — a psalm the apostles were to use so extensively to explain the Lord's absence and priesthood (Acts 2).

THE DISCIPLES RETURN TO JERUSALEM (Acts 1:12-14).

Following the ascension, the apostles returned to Jerusalem with joy. There they were not idle. Luke records that they "were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God" (Lk. 24:52-53). The number of disciples now had swollen to 120, and included the faithful women who had ministered to Jesus, Mary his mother, and his half brothers. They gathered themselves together in an "upper room" where the twelve apostles abode. There they anxiously awaited the outpouring of the Holy Spirit which would signal a new phase of work for them — the public declaration of salvation in the name of Jesus Christ.

A SUCCESSOR FOR JUDAS (Acts 1:15-26).

Peter had undergone a marked change for the better in the days following his denial of the Lord. It was he who took the lead and saw the need to replace Judas. Two scriptures were relevant to Judas at this time; one had been fulfilled by the course of events, and the other yet remained to be.

Psalm 69:25 — "*Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein*". The field which Judas possessed and hanged himself in, became known as "the field of blood" to all "the dwellers in Jerusalem", and being a "cursed" place, none would dwell in it. In this remarkable way this prophecy came to pass.

Psalm 109:8 — "*His bishoprick let another take*". This scripture remained to be fulfilled and Peter took steps to bring this about. He proposed that one be chosen who had accompanied the Lord from the beginning of his ministry at the baptism of John up to the day that he ascended to heaven. Such a one would be adequately furnished with the facts so as to give effective witness to the resurrection. Two men were put forward; Joseph called Barsabas, and Matthias. Before the "lot fell", prayer was made to the Lord to direct their choice, so that the right man might be chosen. The lot fell upon Matthias and so he succeeded Judas and restored the full complement of 12 apostles. God's approval was further indicated by the bestowal of the Spirit upon him (Acts 2:3). It is noteworthy that the disciples took such important matters to Yahweh in prayer. We should not neglect the power of prayer in our lives, for God will guide us if we seek Him.

QUALIFICATIONS OF AN APOSTLE.

There were only "twelve apostles of the Lamb" (Rev. 21:14). Each had the following special qualifications for this wonderful appointment:

1. He must have accompanied the Lord from the time of his baptism to his ascension, and therefore have been an eye-witness of his death and resurrection (Acts 1:21, 22; 10:39-41; Jn. 15:27; Lk. 1:2; 1 Cor. 9:1).
2. He must have been chosen and sent by the Lord (Jn. 13:16).

3. He must have great faith, and it seems that each ultimately, like his Lord, sealed his testimony with his blood (Matt. 20:23; 1 Cor. 4:9; Acts 9:16).
4. He must have wrought the “signs of an apostle” — wonders and mighty deeds performed by the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 12:12; Gal. 2:8).

LESSONS FOR US:

- The book of Acts demonstrates the great power of the gospel to bring men to repentance and salvation.
- The Lord ascended to heaven, but we are assured that he will come in the same manner as he went. This is the foundation fact of the hope revealed in the scriptures.
- The believers left by the risen Lord were fervent in zeal, praying and worshipping continually. The certainty of Christ’s resurrection gave impetus and conviction to their preaching.
- The apostles were instructed in the Word by the risen Lord. Peter was moved by the same Word when he led the apostles in prayerfully seeking for a successor to Judas.

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

“Elpis Israel” (J. Thomas)—Part Second, Ch. 1 “Apostolic Succession”
 “Story of the Bible” (H. P. Mansfield)—Vol. 13, Pages 5-11

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *What matters are stressed by repetition in the book of Acts?*
2. *The apostles asked the Lord, “Wilt thou at this time restore again the Kingdom to Israel?” What was deficient in their understanding?*
3. *What qualifications did the 12 apostles have in order to hold their office?*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *The Lord commanded the apostles to witness to him “in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Outline the way in which the book of Acts shows this was fulfilled.*
2. *How did the Lord and the apostles spend the 40 days prior to the ascension? What is the significance of the angels’ message at the ascension?*
3. *Describe how Matthias became the twelfth apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ. Mention in your answer the Old Testament prophecies concerning Judas.*

2. PETER PROCLAIMS THE RISEN CHRIST AT PENTECOST

“Repent and be baptised . . . in the name of Jesus Christ”

This lesson tells the story of the first public declaration of the gospel in the name of Jesus Christ. The apostles remained in Jerusalem, awaiting baptism with the Holy Spirit, according to the appointment of the Lord. When the Holy Spirit came upon them there was such public interest in their power “to speak with other tongues”, that an enormous crowd gathered, so providing Peter with a ready-made audience. The end result was 3000 baptisms in one day.

The aim of this lesson is to follow carefully the arguments in Peter’s speech which brought conviction to so many.

Acts 2

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PENTECOST.

The Feast of Pentecost (meaning 50 days) was celebrated 50 days after Passover (Lev. 23:9-21). Following Passover, on the “morrow after the Sabbath”, there was waved **one** sheaf of the firstfruits (representing Christ, 1 Cor. 15:23). This was the first day of the week — the very day the resurrection of the Lord took place. Fifty days later, at Pentecost, “**two loaves with leaven**” were offered. And it was fifty days after the Lord’s resurrection that this shadow of the Law of Moses was to have a signal fulfilment. The use of **two** loaves indicates multiplicity while the presence of **leaven** speaks of corruptibility. Thus **three thousand** believers, still with flesh and blood and **mortality**, were baptised into Christ’s death and resurrection (cp. 1 Cor. 15:23).

THE HOLY SPIRIT COMES (Acts 2:1-4).

When the day of Pentecost was fully come, the apostles were all together in one place. Suddenly there came from heaven the sound of a mighty windstorm which filled the house. Then what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on them. Each of them was filled with the Holy Spirit which imparted to them the ability to speak in languages they did not know. Imagine the excitement that must have seized each heart present!

AN ENORMOUS CROWD GATHERS (Acts 2:5-11).

Josephus estimated that two million assembled in Jerusalem for Passover, of whom about half remained for Pentecost. It was therefore a very opportune time for the apostles, filled with the Holy Spirit, to speak in foreign languages. News of this strange happening spread like wildfire through the city and, with characteristic human curiosity, thousands came together to witness the spectacle. Jews from all nations were dumb-founded “because that every man heard them speak in their own

language". It is possible that the apostles were assembled in the Temple precincts near a large colonnade called Solomon's Porch, where Jesus once walked (Jn. 10:23) and where they were to gather in the future (Acts 3:11; 5:12). This was the acknowledged platform of Jewish thought and it would be significant for the gospel of Christ to be set forth there without challenge.

REACTION OF THE CROWD (Acts 2:12-13).

The reaction on the crowd was two-fold. Some were genuinely amazed, while others mocked, as men are prone to do. It then became Peter's duty to explain the mystery and to relate this evidence of divine activity with other remarkable events which had transpired seven weeks earlier. Peter stood up with the eleven and with all boldness lifted up his voice and addressed the crowd. This speech, though taking us but 3-4 minutes to read, doubtless took much longer, perhaps some hours, to deliver, as each aspect was supported by scripture and evidence.

For simplicity we shall divide Peter's speech with subheadings.

A. PETER'S EXPLANATION: NOT DRUNK BUT A FULFILMENT OF JOEL (Acts 2:14-21).

Peter rebuffed the theory of the mockers: the miracle could not be put down to drunkenness. It was but 9 a.m. and it was Jewish tradition not to drink intoxicants prior to this time: "These are not drunken . . . seeing it is but the third hour".

Peter was not content merely to answer their accusation, but grasps the opportunity to formally set forth the gospel. He quotes Joel 2:28-32 and in effect asks them not to be too hasty in drawing conclusions, for this prophet speaks of a time when God would pour out His Spirit upon Israel's sons and wonders would be performed. Was it not possible that the miraculous things they had witnessed were a fulfilment of prophecy? Moreover, Joel declares that two other things would happen at the same time:

1. That the sun would be darkened, and the moon turned into blood (vv. 19-20); i.e. the rulers and state of Israel would be dissolved, which came to pass in A.D. 70.
2. That certain would be saved who called on the name of the LORD (v.21).

The association of Spirit gifts with salvation in Joel provided Peter with a means of passing from one subject to another, for from this point on Peter explains that salvation is bound up with the "Name of the LORD".

Peter's exposition showed that the events of that day were a primary fulfilment of Joel. In the age to come Joel's words will find their complete fulfilment when the Spirit shall be poured upon "all flesh" (v.17). Thus when Peter says, "This is that which is spoken by the prophet Joel", his words carry the meaning, "This is a similar association of

events as Joel speaks of”.

In verse 22 Peter breaks off the Joel quotation. He now explains what salvation in the “Name of the LORD” entails, before completing the quotation from Joel, as he does in verse 39.

B. THE LIFE, DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS (Acts 2:22-24).

These verses have a common factor: God superintended and appointed the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.

1. **Verse 22** shows that **God approved his life**. This, said Peter, was placed beyond all doubt because the miracles he performed were in fact done by God, and God would not allow His power to be used by someone of whom He did not approve. No doubt there were some in the crowd who had either witnessed or been the subject of those miracles, and they could testify if the need arose. It is not difficult to picture the adamant blind man of John 9, for instance, using this opportunity to confirm Peter’s words.
2. **Verse 23** is a bold statement showing that the **death of Christ** was neither mere murder nor martyrdom, but a **matter of Divine foreknowledge** and purpose as the prophets reveal. To this Jesus willingly submitted. “Messiah crucified” was a stumbling block to the Jews and this point would have necessitated scriptural proof (e.g. Isa. 42-53; Psa. 22; 69; Zech. 13:7; Dan. 9:26).

The death of Christ was essential to God’s purpose and not an unfortunate mishap. Salvation in God’s economy entailed the death of a sinless bearer of human nature as the basis for forgiveness of sins for all who would come to God in repentance and baptism. Peter makes the same point elsewhere (3:18; 4:27-28; 1 Pet. 1:11).

3. **Verse 24** shows that it was **God who raised His Son from the grave**. It was a happening quite outside the realm of men, and the story of the bribed soldiers was only a desperate attempt by the priests to save face (Mat. 28:11-15). Death had been introduced in Eden as the wages of sin (Gen. 3:18-19), but Jesus had not sinned. The converse should therefore apply: righteousness should bring life. So Peter declared that it was not possible for the grave to hold him: resurrection crowned Jesus’ obedience which had taken him to the death of the cross.

In effect, then, Peter is saying that the gift of tongues, which had attracted so much attention, was the outcome and evidence of another Spirit-performed work — the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

C. PSALM 16 FORETELLS THE RESURRECTION OF DAVID’S SEED (Acts 2:25-35).

In verses 25-28 Peter quotes Psalm 16:8-11, and then he expounds the resurrection of Christ at length. Because it was so important, as well as being outside their experience, this exposition was necessary. His object is to show that Messiah, whoever he might be, had to be a resurrected man — according to scripture.

Note the phrases in the Psalm which speak of resurrection:

“My flesh shall rest in hope”

“Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell”

“Thou wilt not suffer thy Holy One to see corruption”

“Thou hast made known unto me the ways of life”

“Thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance”

This last phrase speaks also of the ascension and immortality, because flesh and blood cannot see God (1 Tim. 6:16).

Some of these phrases could in themselves be applied to all saints, but others are unique and can apply to only one man — there has only been one man placed in the grave who has not “seen corruption”. Resurrection had to take place soon after burial to fulfil these conditions.

The Psalm is expounded in vv. 29-31. In verse 29 Peter removes any suggestion of applying it to David, the author. He had died and “seen corruption”. David’s tomb containing his remains was near at hand. The tomb Jesus had laid in was empty! Inspection of both would soon remove any doubts as to whom the Psalm referred.

In verse 30, Peter draws the logical conclusion: David was speaking **PROPHETICALLY**. Indeed one had been promised him — “the fruit of his body” — who would sit upon his throne **forever** (2 Sam. 7:12-16; Psa. 132:11). David knew that the problem of mortality, inherent in all his seed, could only be overcome by resurrection. Peter points out in verse 31 that David, understanding this need, spoke of the resurrection of “the Messiah”, that his soul was not left in the grave. Notice that the definite article “the” is used in the original (cp. RSV, Diaglott, etc.). Peter is pointing to the prophetic necessity of **THE** Messiah without identifying him. He argues purely from the text. Scripture required Messiah to be a resurrected man. Peter may well have expounded 2 Sam. 7 along with Psalm 132:11 at this stage.

In verse 32 Peter moves on to apply these Messianic prophecies to Jesus of Nazareth. Great tension no doubt arose with this assertion. The place where Joseph of Arimathea had laid the body was nearby, and only 7 weeks had elapsed since the crucifixion. All Jerusalem knew about the events (Lk. 24:18). They knew the whole story including the lame tale of the guards. Perhaps Peter paused at the end of this verse, giving space for the one thing which could have quashed this basic Christian doctrine. But significantly that fact was not disputed or denied. After all, there were many eyewitnesses present. Truly the words applied to Jesus for he was the only one God ever did raise up before corruption set in.

The next question which naturally arose was: “If Jesus was raised, where is he?” Anticipating this, Peter proceeds to give the answer. The concluding words of Psalm 16 are: “at **THY RIGHT HAND** are pleasures for evermore”. They were not cited earlier, but in this verse Peter returns to Psalm 16 when he says: “Therefore being by the **RIGHT HAND OF GOD EXALTED**”. Psalm 16 not only speaks of the

resurrection of Christ, but also his ascension to heaven. Thus his absence was accounted for. Not only so, but the presence of the Holy Spirit gifts provided further evidence that Messiah had ascended, for Jesus had said that it was expedient for them that he go to heaven, as the Holy Spirit would not come until and unless he ascended to heaven (Jn. 16:7; 7:39).

Further proof that Messiah must ascend and be in heaven for a period of time is to be found in Psalm 110. David had spoken by inspiration of one who would sit at the right hand of God until the time should come when his enemies should be made his footstool. Peter precluded any possible application of the words to David by saying, "For David is NOT ascended into the heavens". David had died and so Psalms 16 and 110 could not apply to him, though he wrote them. (Note that Peter's comment regarding David forms a strong argument against the heaven-going ideas of the churches around us).

D. CONCLUSION (Acts 2:36).

Peter now summarises his address. As Jesus alone fulfils the Messianic anticipations of Psalms 16; 110; 132; 2 Sam. 7 etc., he must be the Christ. David, though his father, had also called him "Lord" (Heb. "Adon"). Jesus is then "Lord and Christ". Thus we have the first public declaration of the Saviour's name — the **Lord Jesus Christ**.

BELIEF AND BAPTISM OF 3000 (Acts 2:37-40).

Peter's words had undeniable reason. This, together with the fresh conviction of an eyewitness, convicted his hearers of sin and they expressed a desire for the key that could free them from guilt and open the door of salvation: "What shall we do?" they said.

Peter had been given the "keys of the kingdom of heaven", and in verse 38 he shows how the kingdom might be entered (Matt. 16:19). Desire was insufficient. It had to be accompanied with repentance — a change of mind involving sorrow and a determination to walk in a new way (2 Cor. 7:9): "Repent . . . AND BE CONVERTED" (3:19). The next step was baptism, which besides symbolising a mental and moral washing (Acts 22:16), also spoke of death AND resurrection of self after the pattern of Christ's death and resurrection. But whereas Christ rose and was given immortality, the believer though yet "in the flesh", must walk in "newness of life" — his is a moral resurrection preparing him for the physical resurrection when the Lord comes (Rom. 6:4-6). Baptism is the first act of obedience, by which one's sins are forgiven. "In Christ" expresses the new status.

Acceptance of Christ in this newly appointed manner was also a prerequisite for receiving the Holy Spirit: ". . . and ye shall receive the Holy Spirit. For the promise is unto you, to your children and to all that are afar off" (vv. 38-39). This verse must not be taken to mean that the Holy Spirit was promised to all believers of all times as some do. Joel, like Peter, was speaking of a particular epoch — the "last days" of the commonwealth of Judah (v.17). The spirit gifts were given at that time to

authenticate the message of the apostles, for the New Testament was not yet written. It was given to that generation and the next — **“you and your children”** — and not just Jews but Gentiles as well — **“to all that are afar off”** (which alludes to Isa. 57:19; cp. Eph. 2:13-17). This is the same as Joel’s message: that **“old men”** and **“young men”** would dream dreams and see visions, and God’s Spirit would be poured out upon **“all flesh”**.

Peter then returned to Joel and quoted the remaining words of chapter 2. The prophet had said, **“And it shall come to pass that all who call upon the name of the LORD shall be delivered; for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those WHOM THE LORD CALLS”** (RSV). In Lesson 3 we shall see how the name of Yahweh became identified with the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Salvation was being promised to those who not only called on the name of the Lord Jesus, but were also called by God.

With many other words Peter exhorted them to save themselves, and his words were met with a wonderful response — the ecclesia’s numbers in Jerusalem increased by 3,000 in one day, as they that gladly heeded Peter’s words were baptised into the name of Jesus Christ.

LESSONS FOR US:

- Peter reasoned from Joel 2, Psalms 16, 132 and 110 to explain the resurrection and ascension of Christ. These events were part of Divine providence in providing a way of salvation.
- Repentance and baptism into Christ are the means of entering the Kingdom of God.
- The witness of all Jerusalem to the fact of the empty tomb and the eyewitness reports of the risen Lord give us great confidence in the truth of the resurrection.
- The response of men and women whose hearts were pricked by God’s words was to gladly receive the Word and be baptised.

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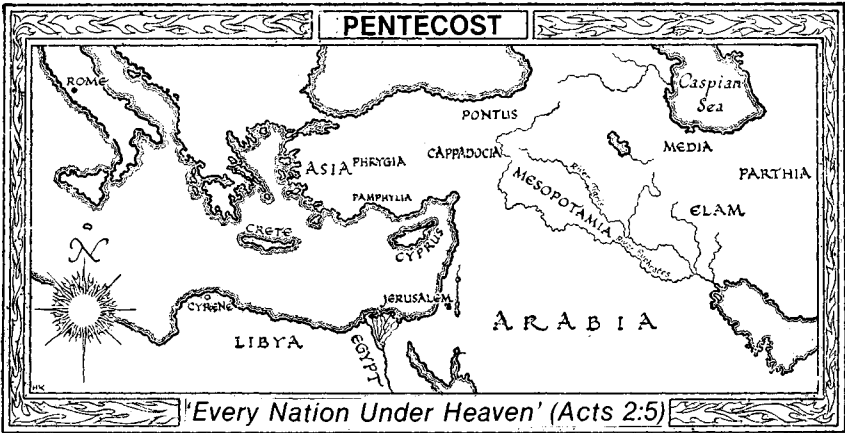
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PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *What was the significance of the Feast of Pentecost?*
2. *How did Peter prove the resurrection of Christ from Psalm 16?*
3. *What use did Peter make of Psalm 110 on the day of Pentecost?*
4. *What “key of the Kingdom” did Peter use on the day of Pentecost?*
5. *How did Peter’s listeners on the day of Pentecost respond to his words, and what did he instruct them to do?*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. Tell briefly how Peter's speech at Pentecost came about and how he preached the risen Christ.
2. Outline Peter's speech on the day of Pentecost, mentioning the main quotations he made from the Old Testament.



FACTS WHICH SHOW THAT THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT ARE NOT AVAILABLE TODAY

1. THE PURPOSE OF THE GIFTS

When the gospel was preached at Pentecost and then went out to all the earth, something extraordinary was needed to make it credible in the eyes of a hostile Jewish world and a pagan Roman world. Just as He had given His seal on the work of Jesus "by miracles and wonders and signs" (Acts 2:22), so God provided the believers in the first century with the Holy Spirit gifts. These gifts gave a "witness to the word" as it was spoken by them (Acts 14:3 RSV; Heb. 2:4; Mk. 16:20).

As the written Word became complete, so this need for the Spirit gifts ceased (Eph. 4:11-14). We now have the work of the Spirit, the completed Bible (Eph. 6:17), and God has withdrawn the miraculous gifts.

The prophet Joel, in the same chapter that Peter quoted on the day of Pentecost, shows this limited duration of the gifts, when he refers to them as "the former rain" and "the latter rain" (2:23). In Israeli agriculture, the "former" or early rain produced the initial growth which led to the harvest, while the "latter" or later rains marked the end of the wet season. So with the Spirit gifts. The initial outpouring of the Spirit in the first century was essential in order to establish the ecclesias. The next outpouring will not be until Christ returns when once more the gospel will go forth throughout the earth.

2. HOW THE GIFTS WERE PASSED ON

The ability to pass on the Spirit gifts was held by the Apostles only. This is indicated by the fact that although Philip's preaching in Samaria was accompanied by miracles (Acts 8:6-7), the Apostles at Jerusalem had to send Peter and John to Samaria in order to transmit the Spirit gifts by the laying on of hands (Acts 8:14-18).

Therefore, after the death of the Apostles, there was no one able to transmit the gifts and so they ceased.

3. THE CESSATION OF THE GIFTS

In 1 Cor. 13 Paul contrasts the temporary character of the Spirit gifts with the permanence of the attributes of faith, hope and love. "Charity (love) never faileth; but whether there be prophecies (i.e. the **gift** of prophecy, 12:1, 9, 10), they shall **fail**; whether there be tongues (i.e. the **gift** of tongues, 12:10), they shall **cease**; whether there be knowledge (i.e. the **gift** of knowledge, 12:8) it shall **vanish away**" (v.8).

Just as Paul stated, the gifts did cease, and "now abideth faith, hope and love" (v.13). This is confirmed by Ivenaces (150-160 AD) who refers to many elder brethren known in his younger days who had possessed the gift to speak "all kinds of languages". The clear implication is that in his days the gift had ceased.

4. SOME FALSELY CLAIM THE GIFTS TODAY

The gift most commonly claimed by the Pentecostal movements today is the gift of "speaking in tongues". To them this means unintelligible speech uttered in a state of religious fervour. But although the AV uses the term "**unknown** tongue" in 1 Cor. 14:2 and elsewhere, the word "unknown" is in italics which indicates that it has no counterpart in the Greek text. The RSV omits the word and refers only to "tongues". These tongues were foreign languages, as was seen on the day of Pentecost when the ex-Galilean fishermen could address visitors to Jerusalem in their native languages (Acts 2:7-11).

Further, each person with the gift of tongues could control himself and regulate when he spoke. Also, no one could speak unless an interpreter

was present (1 Cor. 14:27-33). These characteristics are generally not present at Pentecostal meetings.

5. THE SPIRIT GIFTS WERE ONLY AVAILABLE WHERE THERE WAS TRUE DOCTRINE

In 1 Cor. 12:1-3 Paul states that a person's claim to the Spirit gifts can be tested by the doctrine he teaches: "No man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed". Similarly, John applied the test of sound doctrine, in 1 John 4:2-3. Thus if a person does not hold correct doctrine, then he cannot possess the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Today, we have the spectacle of sects, each believing the other to be apostate, and yet each claim to possess Spirit gifts. It is ridiculous to suggest that God would bestow the seal of His approval, His Spirit, upon all these.

A claim to possess the Spirit gifts cannot replace sound teaching. Even though the Bereans in the days of Paul would have heard of and witnessed the miracles and signs which he performed, they still diligently searched the scriptures to ensure that the things of which he spoke were true (Acts 17:11). Our guide towards those who claim the Spirit gifts today is — "To the law and the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa. 8:20).

6. THE NEW TESTAMENT WAS WRITTEN WHEN THE GIFTS WERE AVAILABLE

Much is said in the epistles about the Spirit gifts which is understandable because they played a large part in first-century ecclesial life. To appropriate this language and emphasis to ecclesial life in these last days of the Gentiles is to violate reason. We live in a different age in different circumstances and we have to take into account the fact that the Spirit gifts have not been bestowed on believers today.

7. THE MEANING OF ACTS 2:39

This passage is most commonly quoted by those who claim that the gifts are available today. The exposition of this verse in Lesson 2 should be referred to.

8. OTHER WRESTED SCRIPTURES

1. **Rom. 11:29** "*For the gifts and the calling of God are without repentance*". Paul is not here referring to the Spirit gifts but the election and place of the seed of Abraham in the purpose of God, as reference to verse 28 shows.

2. **Heb. 13:8** "*Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever*". It is alleged from this passage that the Spirit gifts are available today as in the first century because Jesus Christ does not change. But again the context has to be taken into account. In Hebrews Paul contrasts two systems, one temporary and based on the Law of Moses, and the other permanent based on Jesus Christ. Those under the former are encouraged to leave it and come to Christ who is able to save to the uttermost, for he is consecrated for evermore (Heb. 7:25, 28).

3. THE HEALING OF THE LAME MAN: SALVATION THROUGH A NAME

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

This lesson deals with the progress of the work of preaching by the apostles. Again, a miraculous happening took place and inevitably a crowd gathered, wondering at what they saw. Peter again takes the opportunity to preach. Luke records this second address because it was the direct cause of the first conflict with the authorities.

The aim of this lesson is to analyse the substance of Peter’s address which has an obvious connection with the preaching of “the name of salvation” of Peter’s Pentecostal address, in which salvation was offered to “whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord”. Peter now identifies this name with “the name of Jesus Christ”, in which is remission of sins.

Acts 3

THE LAME MAN IS HEALED (Acts 3:1-11).

When Peter and John were making their way into the Temple to pray at the ninth hour (3.00 p.m.) they saw a lame man placed near the gate of the Temple called Beautiful. This massive gate led from the court of the Gentiles to the court of the Israelites on the eastern side of the Temple. It was 25 metres high and 20 metres wide, and was made of Corinthian brass covered with plates of gold and silver. There were two notable facts about the lame man: first, he was lame “from his mother’s womb”, and thus his disease was longstanding and “incurable”; and second, he was a well-known figure, having been placed in this prominent position “daily” (v.2). As Peter and John passed nearby he begged for alms and when they replied, “Look on us”, he paid heed, expecting to receive something. But Peter told him he had neither silver nor gold but added, “such as I have give I thee: In the NAME OF JESUS CHRIST of Nazareth rise up and walk” (v.6). It seems that Peter was contrasting the inability of the Law to save (symbolised by the gate) with the name of Jesus Christ, when he said, “Silver and gold I have none . . .”. It is notable that Peter later made the same contrast: “. . . ye were not redeemed with corruptible things as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers: But with the precious blood of Christ . . .” (1 Pet. 1:18-19).

The effect of Peter’s words was dramatic. He took the lame man by the right hand, and as he pulled him to his feet his deformed anklebones were healed and strengthened; where there was once but skin and bone, muscles and form appeared. Then, walking, **leaping** and praising God, he went into the Temple with Peter and John. With this miracle, attention is turned to Messiah’s age: “Then shall the LAME man LEAP as an hart” . . . (Isa. 35:6). As the work of Jesus was designed to challenge men to think of the connection between what he did and Messianic

prophecy, so in the apostles' ministry they also displayed the "powers of the age to come". These miracles were in themselves a witness of the age which the apostles proclaimed. They preached healing and salvation from sin and death, and illustrated their message by their works.

The change in this well-known person was immediately noticed as his relief found expression in the joyous liberty of leaping and praising God. The amazed crowd grew and grew and all he could do by way of explanation in that moment of intense emotion was to grasp hold of those responsible, Peter and John. Peter was not slow to use this opportunity to preach the gospel.

PETER'S ADDRESS IN THE TEMPLE (Acts 3:12-13).

The first thing Peter did was to disclaim any power for himself to make the lame man to walk. It had been done through faith in the name of Jesus Christ. Then Peter proceeded to elucidate the significance of the "name", in connection with the things they had seen.

Today, names are like a label used to distinguish individuals from their fellows — no particular significance attaches to them. But Biblical names often had a deep significance, either as memorials or prophecies. Abraham's changed name ("Father of many nations", Gen. 17:5) was prophetic of the divine purpose with him. Of greatest significance is the name given to the Son of God. The name Jesus had indeed been borne by others, but from being simply an expression of faith in God, it had become a prophecy of God's work to be done in him: "Thou shalt call his name **Jesus: For** he shall save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21).

In harmony with the divine use of a name is the choice by God of a name for Himself, by which His purpose would be memorialised — Yahweh: 'He who will be.' The opening statements of Peter's address (v.13) take us back to the time of the Exodus, when God sent Moses to save His people from the bondage of Egypt. Read Ex. 3:1-16 noting the comparison between v.6 and Peter's words. The name given at that time memorialised the visit of God for the redemption of His people.

But the name Yahweh looked to the future, and since it was linked historically with God's redemptive work, its future realization must likewise be associated with redemption. The purpose of God in its larger meaning concerns redemption from sin and death. "I will be whom I will be" epitomizes this larger purpose. In its fulfilment God will have **become**, not merely **done**, something. He will have so worked among men that the result is the embodiment of what He is Himself. Jesus was born by the Spirit's overshadowing of the virgin Mary. The result was one "full of grace and truth", the only begotten Son of God, who could rightly claim, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (Jn. 1:14; 14:9). In him God had **become**, but the larger purpose envisaged others also becoming namebearers of God through identification with the Son in belief and baptism: in this way they too "may be all one" (Jn. 17:21; 1:12-13; Rom. 8:29-30).

Thus Peter's allusion to the time when God gave His name to Moses at the bush is charged with significance — for that name of Yahweh, now identified with the saving name of the Lord Jesus Christ (see Acts 2:21, 36), was the source of the healing.

Peter declares that God "hath glorified his Son Jesus". The word "son" translates a word (Gk. "pais") meaning "boy", in the sense in which colonials have spoken of their coloured servants as "boys". The RSV and other modern versions have translated the word by "servant" and in so doing have provided the thought link to the way Peter explained the development of the "name". God's servant is the particular subject of a series of prophecies in Isaiah. In Luke's method of recording these addresses we have only a precis, but there are significant words and phrases used which are drawn from those Old Testament prophecies. We have to refer to them if we would unlock the substance of the address. In the "Servant Prophecies" (Isaiah 40-55) there are four songs in which the work of the servant is highlighted. They are Isaiah 42:1-6; 49:1-6; 50:4-9 and 52:13-53:12. They reveal a progression of thought: in the first there is only a suggestion that the Servant's role entails suffering ("I will . . . give thee for a covenant of the people . . ."), but in the last we find him subjected to a violent death as the Father purposed. This was the picture which Peter drew in Acts 3:13-15. In verse 13 the statement "God hath GLORIFIED . . ." refers to his resurrection to eternal life and is drawn from Isa. 55:5, while the term "delivered up" comes from Isa. 53:12 (LXX).

CONVICTED OF GUILT (Acts 3:14-16).

Peter's listeners had delivered up and denied Jesus despite Pilate's determination to release him. Peter says this in order to bring home the gravity of their sin. Peter refers to Jesus as "The Holy One" and "The Just", both of which are Messianic titles. God is the "Holy One of Israel", but Messiah in Psalm 16 is so described (see Acts 2:27). In Psalm 16 the title 'Holy One' shows that resurrection before corruption set in would be the sequel of his death, but here Peter uses this title to further emphasise their sin; they killed a Just and an Holy One. There are a number of O.T. references to Jesus as the "Righteous One" (RV), and Jesus' sinlessness is referred to as the basic qualification for rulership (cp. 2 Sam. 23:3; Isa. 32:1; 53:11; Jer. 23:5-6; 33:15; Heb. 4:15).

Peter sums up their crime by accusing them of demanding the release of a murderer (a life-taker), while in fact murdering a life-giver, "the Prince (author', RSV) of life". But God's estimate of Jesus was different — He vindicated him by raising him from the dead. The evidence for this could not be gainsaid; the apostles were witnesses to the fact, and the lame man was too, for he was caused to walk, by faith in the name of Jesus Christ.

PETER'S APPEAL (Acts 3:17-23).

Peter's argument must have come with undeniable force, for it would

seem that they were convicted of guilt. He proceeds to appeal to them in 3 stages:

- 1 **Verse 17:** He points out that the crime was committed in blind emotion and ignorance. They were thus less responsible and now amenable to the wondrous grace referred to by the Saviour while on the cross: "Father forgive them, for they **KNOW NOT** what they do".
2. **Verse 18:** Just as Joseph had encouraged his guilty brethren to see his fate as directed by God for their deliverance, so too Peter points out that the death of Jesus was an essential element in the divine scheme of redemption, as the prophets witness (cp. the Servant Prophecies of Isaiah 40-55; Psalms 22 and 69, etc., see also Acts 2:23; 4:28).
3. **Verse 19:** Finally he calls upon them to repent (Gr. 'change your mind') and be converted (Gr. 'turn around') that their sins might be forgiven and that they might participate in the refreshing times to come from the Lord.

He then explains to them Jesus' whereabouts. God has glorified him by raising him from the dead and causing him to ascend to His right hand. Psalms 16 and 110 are again alluded to by Peter, as is evident from the fact that he says "times of refreshing shall come from the PRESENCE of the Lord", where Jesus is (cp. Psalm 16:11); and also from the fact that he places a limit upon the Lord's duration at his Father's right hand, "whom the heaven must receive UNTIL . . ." (the same argument as in 2:33-35 drawn from Psalm 110:1).

Peter points out that the "restitution of all things" — the subject matter of all the prophets — would have to await the Lord's advent from heaven. In effect he answers the question of all the apostles in Acts 1:5, "Lord, wilt thou at this time RESTORE AGAIN the kingdom to Israel?" The prophets all speak of the restoration of the throne of David and the kingdom of Israel (cp. Jer. 23:8; 24:6; Hos. 3:5; 11:11; Amos 9:11-12).

Next Peter quotes from the words of Moses to show that God envisaged a new covenant to be established through a new mediator raised up from their brethren (vv.22, 23; Deut. 18:18-19). This new covenant was in fact the Abrahamic covenant, for the last words of verse 23 are drawn, not from Deut. 18:18, but Gen. 17:14 (LXX), in which the uncircumcised are cut off from Israel.

In effect Peter is saying that failure to accept Jesus Christ is to be excluded from the Abrahamic covenant, now sealed in the blood of his seed, and not to enjoy the restitution of Israel in Messiah's Age.

A FINAL APPEAL (Acts 3:24-26).

Peter concluded by drawing attention to the fact that all the prophets from Samuel, the first of a new era of prophets (1 Sam. 3:1, 20; Acts 13:20; Heb. 11:32), spoke with one voice about these things. Samuel had foretold the uprise of the Faithful priest — Zadok ("the Just One"),

1 Sam. 2:35). Seeing Israel had a special relationship to God in His purpose, it was only right that they should be “first” informed and invited to partake of the blessings now offered through Abraham’s seed: “Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, ‘And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed’. Unto you first God, having raised up his Son (servant) Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities” (vv.25-26). It is quite clear that in the primary sense the blessings of Abraham concern “turning away” from sins, or justification (Gal 3:8). Before any could inherit the land of promise forever, there had to be conversion and justification, and this was only available in Abraham’s seed through baptism (Gal. 3:26-29).

In view of Peter’s reluctance to go to the Gentiles later on (Acts 10), one wonders whether the apostle at that stage comprehended the full implication of the Spirit’s grand message here that “**all** kindreds of the earth would be blessed.”

LESSONS FOR US:

- There is much food for thought in the speeches recorded by Luke in Acts. We must be alert for words and phrases drawn from the O.T. for their contexts there serve to amplify the message. This is Luke’s method.
- Peter grasped the opportunity offered to speak the Truth—so should we be careful not to let an opportunity slip.
- The name of Jesus Christ is the name of salvation, and through him God’s purpose, made known at the Exodus, will proceed to fulfillment.
- In his preaching Peter convicted his audience of guilt, called for repentance and proved that Christ would come to restore all things.
- The prophets were quoted as absolute authorities and are still such for us.
- The blessing of Abraham concerns both justification and inheritance, through his seed, the Lord Jesus Christ.

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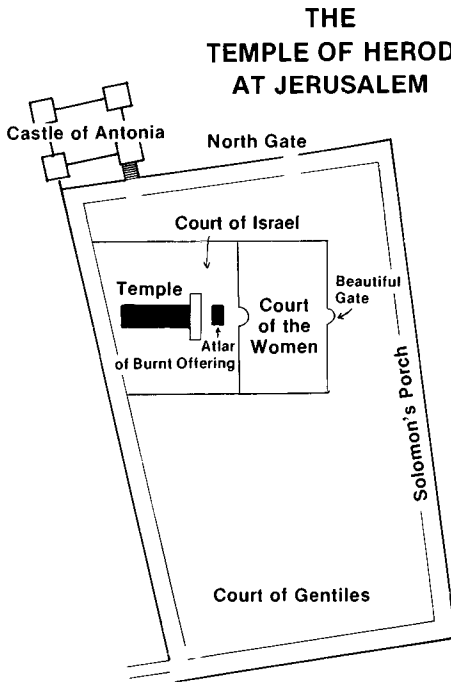
PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *How did Peter appeal to his audience when he addressed them after healing the lame man?*
2. *When Peter spoke to the people after he had healed the lame man, he quoted words taken from the incident of Moses at the Bush. Why did he do that?*

3. How are the *Servant Prophecies of Isaiah (Isa. 40-55)* referred to in Peter's address after healing the lame man?
4. What was the blessing referred to when Peter, after healing the lame man, quoted God's words to Abraham: "And in thy seed shall all kindreds of the earth be blessed"?
5. In one sentence each, answer the following questions about Peter's speech recorded in Acts 3:
 - (a) Through what name was the lame man healed?
 - (b) What did Peter accuse the Jews of?
 - (c) What did he tell them to do?
 - (d) What are the "times of refreshing"?
 - (e) What use did Peter make of Moses' words?
 - (f) What part of the promises to Abraham did he quote?

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. Recount the healing of the lame man and how Peter used this occasion to preach the Gospel (Acts 3).
2. Briefly outline Peter's address following the healing of the lame man.



4. THE APOSTLES ON TRIAL BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

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

The healing of the lame man at the Temple had diverse effects. While it provided Peter and John with unequalled opportunity to capture the attention of the Temple crowd, for it had been heralded as a miracle by the worshippers, it at the same time aroused the wrath of the religious leaders. A new chapter of trial, defence and proclamation was thus begun.

The aim of this lesson is to see how the apostles' conviction of the truth of the resurrection of Christ stood firm against strong and powerful opposition.

Acts 4

THE FIRST CLASH WITH JEWISH AUTHORITIES (Acts 4:1-4).

Great commotion had no doubt developed as Peter preached in Solomon's Porch of Jesus and his resurrection. Such excitement could not for long pass unnoticed by the Temple guard. While Peter continued in his proclamation, the captain of the guard, some priests and Sadducees moved towards the group. They were representative of powerful factions opposed to the declaration of God's truth concerning Jesus. Although placed in positions of religious prominence, their vested interests in maintaining the authenticity of perverted doctrine and in retaining their respected authority, compelled them to adopt a harsh opposition to the education of the people.

The Sadducees particularly felt threatened by the preaching of the apostles. They did not believe in an after-life and denied the resurrection, as is evident from two other incidents recorded in the new Testament (cp. Lk. 20:27; Acts 23:8). It is not surprising then, to read that they were "grieved" to hear that the apostles were preaching "through Jesus the resurrection from the dead" (v.2). Moreover they held the high-priest's office, and were sensitive of anything likely to disturb the comfortable status they had won. They could see now a familiar pattern emerging: a notable miracle; the preaching of the resurrection; the acclamation of the Lord Jesus Christ; a challenge to prestige. (Compare this sequence with Jn. 11:43-53). And so, Peter and John were placed under arrest and imprisoned overnight. Notwithstanding their opposition however, they were effective in converting no less than five thousand men (v.4).

PETER'S BOLDNESS UNDER QUESTIONING (Acts 4:5-12).

The following day the prisoners were arraigned before the court. The Sanhedrin sat, as was their custom, in a circle, and the accused were set before them in their midst. The opening question of the session had a familiar ring: "By what power, or by what name, have you done this?" It

was the same question of authority as they had directed to the Master himself (Matt. 21:23). Peter's reply indicated no concern for the apostles' own security. Rather he strove to advance the name and honour of the Lord Jesus Christ.

With respect he addressed the Sanhedrin as "rulers of the people, and elders of Israel". Their actions, he said, were committed in the name of Jesus Christ. The healing of the lame man, which had precipitated this confrontation, was a "good deed" (v.9), an act of kindness, he reminded them. It was only made possible through the power of Jesus, a man that they, the judges, had crucified. His testimony against them strengthened, Peter continued by declaring that God had raised this same Jesus from the dead and that in his name alone is there hope of salvation. Peter then applied Psalm 118:22 to the actions of the Sanhedrin against Jesus: "the stone which was set at nought of **you** builders . . . is become the head of the corner". Jesus himself had prophesied by use of the same psalm that they would put him to death (Matt. 21:42-45). What power lay in these words!

Peter went on to add that the deliverance granted in the name of Jesus is the only deliverance available, and if men wanted salvation, they must seek it through "the name" of Jesus Christ (v.12).

THE EMBARRASSMENT OF THE AUTHORITIES (Acts 4:13-22).

The obvious facts of the case and the demeanour of the accused were a sore embarrassment to the Sanhedrin. Clearly a miracle had been wrought. Uncomfortable evidence of that appeared before their very eyes, for the man who was lame stood before them (v.14). The bold and fluent speech of both Peter and John was not lost on them, and yet they judged them to be poorly educated men. The explanation of these otherwise inexplicable events was painfully clear to the court. The apostles had "been with Jesus". They may well have remembered the report of one of their officers sent to arrest Jesus: "Never man spake like this man", he had said (Jn. 7:46).

With the apostles removed from the court, the Sanhedrin decided that all that could be done was to threaten and dismiss the prisoners. Although they would have very happily punished them, they were constrained by popular support for the apostles. As they had been unable at one time to move against Jesus, so they were again rendered impotent for they "feared the people" (Mk. 12:12). In desperation the Sanhedrin rested on its authority and charged both Peter and John never to preach their doctrine again. They threatened that if their work continued, they would fall under the court's severe displeasure.

Despite the Sadducees' resolution, the apostles remained undaunted. They replied to the effect that they had a commission from none other than God and that when the directions of men were at variance with the will of God, the former must be ignored (v.19; cp. 5:29). The same principle applies in many aspects today: the laws of men must be obeyed only up to the point where they conflict with God's law. No doubt feeling the

reproach of the two righteous and confident men before them, the elders were only able to threaten them further and let them go.

THE UNITED PRAYER OF THE NEW ECCLESIA (Acts 4:23-31).

Upon their return to their brethren, Peter and John joined with the ecclesia in lifting up their voices to God with one accord. There are some aspects of their prayer that are outstanding. They expressed their adoration of the Father as the Creator of the world (quoting from Ps. 146:6) so setting themselves apart from the heathen who worshipped gods they themselves had created. Their knowledge of the Scriptures allowed them to see themselves as part of the outworking purpose of God. The enmity and malice of the rulers was a vindication of God's Word, for in it they saw an application of the second Psalm. In this context it is interesting to note the description given Christ: "thy holy child Jesus" (v.27). The word "child" signifies both a servant and a son (see Lesson 3 regarding Acts 3:13). He was the Son of God, and yet in the work of redemption he acted as his Father's servant (cp. Isa. 42:1).

Fully aware of the hostility extant to Christ, and mindful that the disciple is not better than his master, the ecclesia prayed that God would graciously motivate them in their preaching work, and bless them with power to work miracles. The effectiveness of miracles in confirming the doctrine they preached was very evident in their most recent experiences. Their prayer, without doubt, was accepted, for it was answered not in word but in power. The place was shaken, that their faith might be established and not shaken, and that they might speak the word with all boldness.

ALL THINGS IN COMMON (Acts 4:32-37).

The concluding verses of this chapter contain a general and beautiful insight into the spirit of the first century ecclesia at Jerusalem. The disciples loved one another dearly. Though there were many of different backgrounds, ages and personalities when they met in Christ, they became as intimately related as the closest brothers of long standing. Property was shared. In this way the Lord's words of Mark 10:30 received their fulfilment. These believers were so preoccupied with hopes of inheritance in the Kingdom that material possessions were as nothing to them. The property in which worldly people trusted was a matter of indifference. No doubt a major factor in their unified enthusiasm was their continuance in preaching the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was a doctrine in which they shared the fullest conviction.

One who was outstanding in his charity was Joses, surnamed Barnabas by the apostles. He was held in respect by the ecclesia as a man endued with particular gifts of prophecy and teaching (13:1). Appropriately his qualities of character were reflected in his name which is translated variously, as "son of exhortation", "son of consolation", or "son of prophecy" (cp. 11:23). Barnabas was of the tribe of Levi who throughout history had been sustained from the common purse — the tithes of the 12

tribes. His sale of his land spoke eloquently of the traditional view of land constituting excess to a Levite — Yahweh being their inheritance (Deut. 18:1-5; Num. 35:2; Josh. 14:3).

LESSONS FOR US:

- When the commands of men conflict with the Law of God, we must obey God rather than men.
- Peter and John overcame intimidation before the Sanhedrin with a positive approach to the proclamation of the Truth. The Lord's words take on increased meaning in the light of the apostles' faithfulness: "whosoever . . . shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 10:32).
- Prayer sustained the disciples at a critical time of opposition. They saw the fulfilment of scripture in the animosity of the authorities, as we should in the apathy and ungodliness in today's society. "After this manner therefore pray ye . . . Thy will be done . . ." (Matt. 6:9-10).
- The spirit in the ecclesia was one of selflessness. Many gave freely and generously all material excess for the common good. "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10).

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

"Story of the Bible" (H. P. Mansfield)—Vol. 13, Pages 28-32

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *Why were the Sadducees confounded when they called Peter and John before the Sanhedrin?*
2. *Summarise Peter's first address to the Sanhedrin (Acts 4).*
3. *What was the response of Peter and John when they were asked by the Sanhedrin not to speak of Jesus?*
4. *Of the early Jerusalem ecclesia it is written: "they had all things in common". Explain what this means.*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *Comment on the defence of Peter and John before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4). Why were they so fearless in the face of such strong opposition?*
2. *How did the Jerusalem ecclesia respond at the time of Peter and John's release by the Sanhedrin and what sign was given to it?*

5. OBEYING GOD RATHER THAN MEN

“We ought to obey God rather than men”

It is true that until the Lord Jesus Christ returns from heaven, all things will lack perfection. It has always been thus. The young ecclesia, as with the present, was not without its problems and shortcomings. It is significant that the fifth chapter of Acts begins with “But”, for it puts a stop to the pleasant and agreeable prospects suggested by the earlier chapters.

Our aim in this lesson is to see the need for wholehearted and faithful service, without hypocrisy, which will be rewarded by the overshadowing care of an Almighty God.

Acts 5

A BLIGHT ON THE ECCLESIA’S UNITY (Acts 5:1-11).

Ananias and his wife Sapphira, in common with many of the disciples, took it upon themselves to sell some of their property. Unlike the others, however, who surrendered all the proceeds to a common purse, they conspired to retain a part themselves, while surrendering the other portion to the apostles. Human nature had come to the fore. In v.3 Peter says, “why hath Satan filled thine heart”, an expression which is parallel to his later comments “why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart” in v. 4 and “how is it that ye have agreed together” in v.9. As Jesus said, “Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts” (Matt. 15:19).

The incorrectness of their actions lay in their attempted deception of the apostles, in that they would have had them believe that their contribution represented the entire proceeds. Their sin was lying to God Himself. Peter was severe in his reaction, and the fate of Ananias and Sapphira terrible, but the strong words of Christ against hypocrisy should be borne in mind (Matt. 23: 13–16, 23–29). Contributions to the community’s goods were voluntary, not compulsory (v.4). Ananias and Sapphira were under no compulsion to sell their property at all, but seem to have been motivated to do so from a desire to appear righteous before the ecclesia. Neither was there any requirement for the total receipt of such a sale to be surrendered. It was their calculated hypocrisy for which they were held accountable. Such mischief menaces brotherly love, trust and sincerity.

THE APOSTLES’ MIRACULOUS POWER (Acts 5:12-16).

As a result of the terrible judgment inflicted on the two transgressors, “great fear came upon all the ecclesia” (v.11). The believers were confirmed in their adherence to the apostles and to one another. They met in the temple; in the open place that was called “Solomon’s Porch”. The record says they were there with one accord, unanimous in their doctrine,

worship and discipline. The people magnified them, and had them in great veneration. Aside from those who joined themselves to the band in belief however, a respectful but uncertain aloofness was practised by the crowd (v. 13). Many signs and wonderful works were seen at the apostles' hands, and by such works both the preachers and their doctrines gained in reputation. All manner of people clamoured to take advantage of their healing power, and obtained it. It would seem that even the passing shadow of Peter was sufficient to ease the afflicted and comfort the stricken. "He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do" (Jn. 14:12).

FURIOUS OPPOSITION REDUCED TO IMPOTENCE (Acts 5:17-28).

In the good and effective work that was being achieved, the Sanhedrin saw their worst fears realised. They viewed with alarm anything in the nature of a popular uprising, fearing for their wealth and dignity, their power and tyranny. All would be inevitably lost if the spiritual doctrine of Christ should prevail among the people. The Sadducees had a particular enmity to the gospel of Christ because it challenged their disbelief in the resurrection. Though the authorities were unable to lay any criminal charge against the apostles, in a fury of jealousy they had them arrested and put into the common jail. No doubt the Jewish leaders sought by so doing to both frighten the apostles and destroy the respect surrounding them.

God however determined a course which the Sanhedrin could not amend. An angel released the prisoners that same night, and instructed them to continue preaching publicly in the temple (v.20). Refreshed by heavenly confirmation of their mission, and fearless of the intervention of men, the apostles immediately set themselves to the task.

Meanwhile, the Sanhedrin and entire Senate gathered to crush their witness to the resurrected Christ (v.21). What amazement they must have experienced when told the prisoners could not be found in the prison. We can imagine that mingled with their wonder may well have been disquieting apprehension. Annoyance must have followed, upon their learning that yet again were the apostles boldly continuing their efforts in the temple. Daring not to use violence, the captain and his men repeated the arrest and brought them before the Sanhedrin. On behalf of the august assembly the high priest reprimanded the brethren for not submitting to the court's injunction to cease preaching in the name of Jesus Christ. They had spread false doctrine among the people, he said, and demonstrated a malicious design against the government. Their widespread accusations of priestly guilt for the death of Jesus were unacceptable.

THE APOSTLES SPEAK THE UNPALATABLE TRUTH (Acts 5:29-32).

Peter and the apostles answered the charge with a powerful rebuff.

They were justified in disobeying the command of the Sanhedrin; they declared: **“We ought to obey God rather than men”**. God had commanded that they teach in the name of Christ. They were compelled therefore to do so. Unhesitatingly, and without excuse or begging for pardon, they repeated the charge of murder against their audience. “You slew him and hanged him on a tree”, they said. The God of their common fathers had raised him up and established him as a “prince” and “saviour” — one who would exercise sovereignty over man, but with the object of securing their salvation.

Of the truth of the resurrection, they were sure, for they had both seen him alive after his death and witnessed his ascension to heaven. Moreover the miracles wrought by the Holy Spirit showed plainly that God was with them. Judge you, they implied, whether we ought to obey you in opposition to Him.

CALM COUNSEL TEMPORARILY PREVAILS (Acts 5:33-42).

When the members of the council heard these words, they were so furious they wanted to kill them. There rose to his feet, however, one Gamaliel, whose words were to moderate the rage of the court and check the violence of the persecution. Gamaliel proceeded to cite two cases of seditious men whose attempted coercion came to nothing. If the apostles were of a similar type, he argued, their efforts would likewise be brought to nought. On the other hand, if God were with them, His purpose would inevitably be achieved. Were the Sanhedrin to oppose the work in this case, they could find themselves opposed to the might of God. Though God’s work may be vigorously opposed, it cannot be overthrown. The simple logic of Gamaliel’s conviction assured the assent of the assembly. They could not forebear though giving some vent to their rage and, before releasing the apostles they beat them and again commanded them not to speak any more in the “name of Jesus”.

In the face of physical persecution and mental torment, the wonderful courage and constancy of the apostles shone through as a brilliant beacon. They bore their sufferings with an invincible cheerfulness, “rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for **his name**”. In this the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount found an application (Matt. 5:11-12). It was fitting that Peter should later encourage believers to be joyful in tribulation (1 Pet. 4:12-13). The chapter concludes with the simple statement that “they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ”. They lost no opportunity to declare the gospel. Their zeal continued unabated.

LESSONS FOR US:

- When the spirit of greed and hypocrisy was discerned in the ecclesia, the offenders were struck dead. This gives us understanding of the Divine assessment of such activity, and serves as a warning of the judgment to come.

- Ecclesial unity comes with steadfastness and purity of doctrine. Discipline is essential. Unity engenders enthusiasm and effectiveness. “Be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58).
- The second release of the apostles testifies to the overshadowing providential care for a faithful ecclesia. Our challenge lies in obedience to the One who showed such care.

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

“Story of the Bible” (H. P. Mansfield)—Vol. 13, Pages 33-39

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *Peter said to Ananias, “Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?” What did he mean by this?*
2. *How did the apostles’ miracles assist in the proclamation of the gospel and what did Peter say about them when he stood before the Sanhedrin?*
3. *Highlight the points made by Peter and the apostles when they defended their obedience of God rather than men on the second occasion when they stood before the Sanhedrin.*
4. *Describe some of the features of early ecclesial life at Jerusalem.*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *Relate the drama involving Ananias and Sapphira, and discuss its implications for ecclesial activity.*
2. *How were the Sanhedrin’s interests threatened by the activity of the apostles, and how did they move to protect them?*
3. *“If it be of God ye cannot overthrow it”. Who said these words and why were they said?*

6. STEPHEN—MARTYR FOR THE KINGDOM

“They were not able to resist the wisdom and the power by which he spake”

Despite the opposition from the Jewish authorities, their threats and prohibitions, the ecclesia multiplied and the word of Yahweh spread as the apostles continued to preach. However, as Jewish converts from foreign backgrounds and customs were added to the saints, problems arose which placed added difficulties in the way of the Truth’s progress. To cope with these problems there were selected seven brethren, amongst whom was Stephen who saw clearly that God could not be confined to Jewish affairs alone.

Our aim in this lesson is to see how Stephen took a further step forward in the opening of the door of faith unto the Gentiles and to take heart from his conviction and courage.

Acts 6 and 7

THE NEGLECTED WIDOWS (Acts 6:1-6).

The rapid expansion of the truth placed burdens upon the facility of the ecclesia to organise and administer. For example, 3,000 converts came from Peter’s speech at Pentecost and 5,000 from the healing of the lame man at the Temple Gate called Beautiful.

The wealthy shared their excess with the poor (Acts 4:32-34) and this produced unity and a bond in the spirit of Christ such as their Master had taught on many occasions (Matt. 6:25-34; Lk. 6:38).

It should be a stark warning to us, that even in these near ideal conditions ill-feeling was generated. It arose because of differences between the Greek-speaking Jews and the Jerusalem Jews, who largely maintained traditional customs and the Hebrew language.

The differences concerned an apparent discrimination in the matter of providing daily food for the Grecian-Jewish widows (Acts 6:1, R.V.). Until then the apostles had the responsibility of distributing the material needs (4:35-37; 5:1-2). Now the stage had been reached where this work needed to be delegated, so that the apostles could concentrate on their primary commission to preach and teach the word of God (6:2-4), and attend to prayer for the guidance of the work.

The ecclesia was called together and this matter explained to them, and the first ecclesial election then took place. The seven appointed were Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte of Antioch. All save the last have Greek names, and so it appears Divine guidance ensured that the Grecian widows would now have brethren especially concerned for their welfare looking after them. The apostles sealed their approval by the laying on of hands (v.6).

STEPHEN ARRESTED (Acts 6:7-12).

These seven, especially Stephen, did not confine their work in the Truth to the immediate task of providing daily bread for the widows — it was Stephen's preaching and miracles that made a startling impact (v.8).

The gospel of Christ had converted many of the priests (v.7), who in many cases brought into the ecclesia deeply ingrained convictions concerning the place of worship and the relevance and observance of the Law of Moses. They saw Christ and grace as complementary to the Law, not as a fulfillment and replacement of the Law. Thus the seeds were sown for the subsequent conflicts with Judaism (Acts 15:1, 5; Gal. 2:11-21), as customs, rituals and observances became matters of doctrinal insistence by some.

Stephen may have hoped to avert some of these difficulties by going to the synagogue of the "Libertines and Cyrenians and Alexandrians and of them of Cilicia and of Asia" (v.9). However, disputes arose, and here Stephen no doubt came up against Saul of Tarsus of **Cilicia** (22:3), the foremost proponent of the Law — a "Hebrew of the Hebrews". These Jews were, however, not able to withstand or resist the wisdom of Stephen (v.10).

STEPHEN CHARGED WITH BLASPHEMY (Acts 6:13-15).

In an ominous repetition of the methods used to falsely convict the Lord Jesus Christ, they secretly bribed men to falsely accuse Stephen of blasphemy against Moses and God. They incited the people and the elders and scribes to arrest Stephen and bring him before the Sanhedrin.

False witnesses said they had heard Stephen speak blasphemy against:

- (1) the Temple ("this holy place" v. 13); and
- (2) the Law of Moses.

The words of Jesus concerning the destruction of the Temple were recalled and used in formulating the charges. The same words had been used by the Jews when they reviled Jesus at his crucifixion, not realizing that Jesus had spoken of the Temple of his body (Jn. 2:19-21; Mk. 15:29).

Death was the Sanhedrin's objective and so they secured the necessary false witnesses (Deut. 19:15). As they awaited Stephen's answer to these charges, to their amazement his face took on the countenance and appearance of an angel. Surely Yahweh was with him as he had promised (see Matt. 10:17-20).

STEPHEN'S DEFENCE (Acts 7:1-50).

In answering the charges brought against him, Stephen outlined the history of the nation using the Old Testament scriptures in such a way as to demonstrate that the scope of Yahweh's plan of salvation **was not limited by the Law or the physical Temple**. This plan was to include Gentiles (Isa. 49:6), involve replacing the Law of Moses (Jer. 31:31-33), and go beyond the Temple then standing, to culminate in a great House of Prayer for **all nations** (Isa. 56:7). The time had now come for men to worship Yahweh in "Spirit and in Truth" (Jn. 4:23), upon the principle

of faith (Hab. 2:4), without the confinement of the Law and the Temple. To show that these principles were eternal and Yahweh had always worked that way, Stephen took them back to the foundations of the nation. He began with Abraham and proceeded to bring before them the following points in his defence.

ABRAHAM (Acts 7:2-8).

- (a) The God of glory who shone forth and spoke to Moses from between the cherubim in the Most Holy Place (Num. 7:89; Ps. 80:1), appeared to Abraham in **Babylon**. Thus Yahweh is not limited to communicating with men only within a tabernacle or temple.
- (b) Separation and faith are the essential requirements since Abraham found favour with Yahweh before he dwelt in Haran, and certainly **before** he ever set foot in the land of **Israel** (vv.3-4; cf. Gen. 12:1-3).
- (c) God must have some **future** purpose with Abraham and the land of Israel independent of the Law, since he never possessed it **in his lifetime** (v.5; cf. Heb. 11:13). This must involve a future resurrection.
- (d) Though **in Egypt**, the people were still considered to be Abraham's seed (v.6).
- (e) Israel acceptably worshipped Yahweh **at Sinai**, outside the boundaries of the land of Israel, before the Law was given or the tabernacle erected (v.7). Note the manner in which Stephen adds Ex. 3:12 to Gen. 15:13-14 to demonstrate the point.
- (f) Circumcision **preceded** the Law. Israel was bound to God by a covenant, the sign of which was circumcision, signifying the cutting off of the works of the flesh (v.8; Gal. 3:17; Jn. 7:22).

JOSEPH (Acts 7:9-16).

Stephen then moved on to consider Joseph. Stephen drew inferences from the nation's rejection of deliverers Yahweh had sent them, such as Joseph. He implied that Israel had repeated history in rejecting Jesus of Nazareth.

- (a) **Envy** was the motive for selling Joseph into Egypt for 20 pieces of silver (v.9; cp. Mk. 15:10). The Sanhedrin's memories were no doubt fresh with the recollection of another such transaction involving 30 pieces of silver for the betrayal of Jesus.
- (b) "But God was with him" (v.9), that is even **in Egypt!** So much for God being confined by the Law, Temple, or even the land of Israel.
- (c) Joseph gained favour in Pharaoh's eyes and became **governor of Egypt** (v.10). In all this God was instrumental. The parallels with Jesus are obvious; first rejected by his nation and then raised to high office. Peter had shown this at Pentecost (Acts 2:33-36).
- (d) Israel had to find sustenance **among Gentiles** (v.12).

- (e) Israel recognised Joseph the **second time** (v.13). History would repeat itself in the future, in events surrounding Jesus Christ (Micah 5:2-5; Zech. 12:10), when on his second appearance the nation realizes its tragic mistake in rejecting him.
- (f) Stephen included children of Ephraim and Manasseh born in Egypt of an Egyptian mother among the children **of Israel** (see Gen. 46:20 LXX; cp. Num. 26:28-37; 1 Chron. 7:20). This explains the apparent discrepancy between the 75 souls mentioned here and the 70 mentioned in Gen. 46:26; Ex. 1:5; Deut. 10:22. So much for the unhealthy emphasis on the sanctity of the Land, without appreciating the great spiritual truths associated with it.
- (g) Furthermore, Stephen points out that Joseph and the other sons of Jacob (i.e. the fathers of the nation) were buried **at Sychem** or Shechem, which at the time was in the midst of despised Samaria! (cp. Josh. 24:32; Gen. 48:22). What a blow to their nationalistic pride.

MOSES (Acts 7:17-43).

The history of Moses is advanced to further answer charges of blasphemy and to show how again Israel had rejected a deliverer and saviour sent to them.

- (a) The nation had developed and grown **in Egypt** (v.17). In fact Stephen had shown that each major event in the development of Israel had taken place outside the land. Where were the grounds for a charge of blasphemy against "this holy place"?
- (b) Their deliverer and Law-giver Moses was saved, nourished and educated **by the Egyptians** (vv.18-22). Only Moses' parents had the faith to resist Pharaoh's command; the rest killed their own children in subservience to the Gentiles. What a beginning to a nation now so proud and insistent on observance of its traditions!
- (c) Moses was **rejected by his brethren** even in the midst of trying to save them (vv.23-26). Jesus had suffered a like fate (cf. Matt. 23:27). Stephen's quotation, "Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us" is reminiscent of Jesus' parable in which the people say of the nobleman, "We will not have this man to reign over us" (Lk. 19:14).
- (d) Moses had to flee to a "**far country**" where he received a divine revelation of Yahweh's purpose and found a bride among the **Gentiles** (vv.29-30).
- (e) Yahweh announced Himself as "The God of thy fathers" to Moses (v. 32), on the "holy ground" in the **Sinai wilderness** (v.33). Was the Temple area then the only holy place where Yahweh could be worshipped or was the Law necessary for acceptable worship? Stephen had successfully refuted the charges in these striking points.
- (f) Stephen again brings before them the evidence of a rejected leader; "This Moses **whom they refused**" (v.35). God sent "this same

Moses” back to be a ruler and deliverer. As with the case of Joseph, Israel was forced to accept him at the second appearance. The obvious analogy is Yahweh’s purpose with Jesus. Stephen’s purpose in recalling their history in this way is to make this plain.

- (g) Yahweh worked His wonders **in Egypt, in the Red Sea and the wilderness** (v.36). No mention is made of the land of Israel.
- (h) The pointed warning of Deut. 18:18 was next brought forward by Stephen. The prophet **like Moses** had indeed been raised up but they had not hearkened to him (v.37).
- (i) God was worshipped **in the wilderness** (v.38). Israel was termed the ecclesia **there** and **there** the Law or oracles were mentioned for the first time in Israel’s history.
- (j) However, Israel’s history shows that they disobeyed the very Law they were now accusing Stephen of blaspheming. They rejected Moses as a leader (v.39), and worshipped an idol even as the Law was being given to Moses (vv.40, 41). **Herod’s Temple**, the work of their hands (Jn. 2:20), was to suffer the same fate as the golden calf (Mk. 13:1, 2).
- (k) Stephen then combined the words of two prophets, Amos (5:25-27) and Jeremiah (20:4, 5), to show that Israel would, because of their disobedience, be taken captive beyond Babylon this time. They were, in effect, worse off than Abraham before his call from Babylon (cf. v.4). The Romans were the means by which this prophecy was fulfilled in A.D. 70.

THE TEMPLE (Acts 7:44-50).

Stephen now moved to consider the status of the Temple in which the Jews prided.

- (a) Israel first worshipped Yahweh **in a tent in the desert** (v.44).
- (b) This was at least made to **divine specifications**: “as he had appointed”, “speaking unto Moses”, “and was made according to the fashion he had seen” (v.44). This claim could not be met by Herod’s Temple!
- (c) Joshua drove Gentiles out of the land of Israel to establish the tabernacle. But it was not **until the time of David** that the site of the Temple was in fact taken from the Gentiles!
- (d) David, the man after God’s own heart, had found favour with God **without having a temple to worship in**, and in fact was prevented from building one (v.46).
- (e) When Solomon eventually built the temple (v.47), he acknowledged that “the Most High **dwelleth not in temples made with hands**” (1 Kgs. 8:13, 27-30)!
- (f) Stephen answered the question, “Where then is God worshipped acceptably?” by quoting Isa. 66:1-2, “What **house** will ye build me?” and the reply comes, “to this **man** will I look even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit and trembleth at my word” (vv.49-50).

Yahweh is worshipped, by being manifest in people performing His will.

STEPHEN MOVES FROM DEFENCE TO ATTACK (Acts 7:51-53).

Though never once mentioning Jesus by name, the allusions were plain. It is obviously Jesus whom Stephen had in mind in directing the Jews to Moses and Joseph; both were rejected deliverers who were recognised at a second manifestation. The anger of the Sanhedrin was probably apparent at this stage, and so Stephen launched into a strong attack, pointing out that they were in fact uncircumcised in heart and ears, and were repeating the mistakes of past generations in their stiff-necked attitude, and their murderous intent towards Yahweh's prophets (vv.51-52).

His attack reached a climax when he accused them directly of the murder of Jesus Christ, the "Just One" (a title already applied to him by Peter in Acts 3:14). Whilst pretending to uphold the Law and charging him with blasphemy against it, they were in fact, guilty of breaking it themselves (v.53).

THE MURDER OF STEPHEN (Acts 7:54-60).

The rage produced by Stephen's onslaught was blinding (v.54).

Stephen was strengthened by a vision of the Lord Jesus Christ standing at the right hand of his Father (v.55). This standing was a sign of impending judgment. The oft-quoted Psalm used by the apostles (Psa. 110:1-2), had stated that the future ruler would **sit** at Yahweh's right hand, **until** his enemies were made his footstool. Thus Stephen saw the Lord Jesus Christ about to tread upon his enemies in vengeance for the blood of himself and other faithful servants of all ages (Rev. 6:9-10).

Rushing upon Stephen with blocked ears at this considered blasphemy, they carried him outside the city and the first martyr (or witness unto death) for the cause of the new faith as it was in Christ Jesus, fell under a barrage of stones (vv. 57-58).

As he died Stephen prayed that his life might have been acceptable as a sweet sacrifice unto Yahweh, and like his Master before him he prayed for his murderers (v.60; cf. Lk. 23:34). This prayer did not go unanswered, for Saul of Tarsus, at whose feet the witnesses laid their clothes and who was at that moment the Truth's bitter enemy, later became Christ's great ambassador to the nations.

LESSONS FOR US:

- The apostles arranged for the care of the humblest members of the ecclesia, as well as the ministrations in the Word of God.
- Stephen is a great example for us in the way he combined the attributes of a student of the Word of God with qualities of compassion and concern for others less fortunate and in need of physical sustenance.

- Stephen came into conflict with opponents of the Truth because of his fearless proclamation of the gospel. He did not flinch in this conflict.
- Yahweh is interested in men and women of humble and contrite character, who have a reverence for His Word, and not in formal religion based on ritual and vain tradition, such as the Jews of Stephen's day practiced.
- A vision of future glory sustained Stephen in his last moments, enabling him to see the present sufferings as a brief passing phase. Mental pictures of the future age can sustain us too.

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

"The Story of the Bible" (H. P. Mansfield)—Vol. 13, Pages 39-52

"The Christadelphian" (J. Carter)—Vol. 93 (1956), Pages 408-410

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *What problem in the early ecclesia brought Stephen into prominence in the work?*
2. *What similarities did Stephen imply existed between the treatment of Joseph and Moses and that of the Lord Jesus Christ?*
3. *What are the essential requirements for acceptable worship of Yahweh? How do these contrast with Jewish thought at the time of Stephen?*
4. *Record the events that occurred at the end of the trial of Stephen.*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *What lessons did Stephen draw from the lives of Joseph and Moses in his defence before the Sanhedrin.*
2. *What were the charges laid against Stephen and briefly comment on how they were answered?*

Section 2

THE WITNESS SPREADS TO SAMARIA, ANTIOCH AND THE WORLD

The story of the conquest of Christianity is to a large extent the story of the Apostle Paul. The first section of our lessons concluded with the picture of Paul, or Saul as he was then called, overseeing the stoning of Stephen. Our second section takes up the story of Paul from his conversion and shows how the once implacable enemy of the Truth took the Gospel to the Gentiles afar off — to Galatia, to Macedonia, to Achaia, to Asia and then on to Rome and Spain. As a result, the hope of a risen Messiah, which was first preached in Jerusalem, the centre of the Jewish world, was preached not only in Rome, the centre of the Roman world, but throughout the whole Roman Empire.

But before Paul could go to the Gentiles, some further steps needed to be taken. So this section of our lessons commences with Philip the Evangelist taking the gospel first to half-Jews, the Samaritans, and then to a Gentile-turned-Jew, the Ethiopian eunuch. Then Peter takes up the work and introduces the Truth to the first Gentile converts, Cornelius and his household.

7. THE GOSPEL NET WIDENS: TO SAMARIA AND ETHIOPIA

“They that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word”

The death of Stephen was the signal for the development of the next dramatic sequence of events in the spread of the gospel.

The Truth’s opponents, the Jewish authorities and Saul of Tarsus in particular, no doubt strengthened by their apparent triumph in securing Stephen’s death, unleashed fierce persecution against the ecclesia.

This had the effect of scattering the several thousand strong ecclesia at Jerusalem far and wide, which was Yahweh’s purpose; to further spread the glad tidings of the kingdom and the things concerning the name of Jesus Christ.

The aim of this lesson is to see this spread of the gospel and to measure the response of men and women to it.

Acts 8

SAUL MAKES HAVOC IN THE ECCLESIA (Acts 8:1-4).

One of the most remarkable evidences of the truth of the Gospel is the fact that a man like Saul of Tarsus could be converted and become the great apostle to the Gentiles that he did. The merciless persecution of the ecclesia following Stephen’s death, found Saul as its most deadly and ruthless instrument. His own words uttered later in his life best summarize his fanatically misplaced zeal. To the Galatians he wrote “. . . beyond measure I persecuted the ecclesia of God and wasted it” (Gal. 1:13. See also Acts 22:4, 19-20; 26:9-11). Both men and women suffered as they were dragged from their homes to prison; the synagogues were invaded to search them out and they were often put to death through Saul’s instrumentality.

The Jerusalem ecclesia was scattered abroad throughout Judea and even Samaria (v.1), as a result of this persecution, although the apostles remained in Jerusalem showing their courage and faith.

The Lord Jesus Christ had told the apostles in his last words to them (Acts 1:8), that they would witness to him “in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth”. The preparatory events had taken place as the word of the gospel began to be carried forth through Judea and Samaria. “They that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching (Gk. ‘announcing the good news of’) the word” (v.4).

What faith these early brethren and sisters had, to announce “good news” in the face of such cruel and fierce persecution. Saul’s purpose was thus frustrated, for in attempting to suppress and destroy “that way”, he in fact contributed to its spreading beyond Jerusalem.

Some travelled further to “Phenice (Phoenicia), Cyprus and Antioch (in Syria), preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only” (11:19).

Some of these were proselytes themselves from Cyprus and Cyrene in Africa, and they spoke the Gospel to the Grecians (Gentiles) at Antioch. Thus the gospel net began to widen and Jewish prejudice was being gradually conquered. How fitting that Stephen's speech had provided the initial impetus for this.

There was no more striking illustration of this breaking down of prejudices than the proclamation of the truth in Samaria. Jews and Samaritans normally had no dealings with each other (Jn. 4:9). The Lord Jesus had initiated the work of preaching the gospel in Samaria when he spoke to the woman at Jacob's well and subsequently many Samaritans believed on him and his word (Jn. 4:41).

PHILIP PREACHES IN SAMARIA (Acts 8:5-13).

Philip (called the Evangelist, Acts 21:8), was one of the seven chosen along with Stephen (6:5). He went to Samaria to preach Christ. Though the Samaritans' religion was a mixture of truth and error they did believe in the coming of Messiah (Jn. 4:25). The people "with one accord" attended to Philip's preaching and observed the miracles which he performed (v.6). They believed the "things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ" and were baptised. Note that the things concerning the **name** of Jesus Christ were now included as essential elements of the gospel (v.12; cf. Lk. 8:1; 9:2).

In his prophecy to Israel, Isaiah had said, "Who hath **believed** our report and to whom is the arm of Yahweh **revealed**?" (53:1). The Samaritans had **believed** and had **seen** the evidence of Yahweh's power demonstrated by Philip in healing many of them.

The Samaritans had shown this readiness to believe the spoken word and accept it, even without confirmation of the miracles, when Jesus had been among them (Jn. 4:41-42); "Many more believed because of **his own word**, and said unto the woman, now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves and know that this is indeed the Messiah, the Saviour of the world".

SIMON THE SORCERER.

There was, however, one among the Samaritans who was more motivated by sight than faith. He was Simon, a sorcerer who had been "giving out that himself was some great one" (v.9). He had a great following and all the people of the city attributed his power to God, and he was consulted on all matters (vv. 10, 11).

No doubt he had a knowledge of the sciences such as chemistry, and the arts of the conjurer, and was able to uphold his reputation and power over the people.

He accepted the Truth, was baptised, and associated with Philip in the work, but it was the miracles which Philip did which impressed Simon most. We are told "he wondered" at the miracles and signs. The word is the same as "bewitched" in verses 9 and 11, showing that he was

mesmerized by the power. His conversion was not a true one, not being based on the word and faith without qualification.

PETER AND JOHN SENT TO SAMARIA (Acts 8:14-24).

The success of Philip's work in Samaria was gladly received in Jerusalem, and the apostles, Peter and John, were sent north to Samaria.

Peter had shown at Pentecost that the seal of belief and faith in the one gospel was the bestowal of the Holy Spirit (2:38). This power to bestow the Spirit though rested solely with the apostles, and Philip could not communicate it to others, although he possessed it himself, having had it bestowed by the apostles (6:6). When Peter and John arrived they prayed that the Spirit might come upon those who believed (vv. 15, 16 and note v. 18 —references which emphasise the fact that the presence of the apostles was required for the gifts of the Spirit to be passed on).

Simon observed that the Spirit was conferred by the apostles laying their hands upon those who were to receive it (vv. 17, 18; also 19:6). He stooped to offering the apostles money for the power to pass on the gift of the Holy Spirit to others. His intention was obviously to make merchandise of the Holy Spirit and he was willing to invest his money to obtain it (v. 19). He was concerned with his power and influence which had nourished his pride before Philip came upon the scene and ended his pre-eminence in the city.

Peter condemned him outright and warned him that he was in danger of perishing with his money (vv. 20, 21). Peter's words cast doubt on the likelihood of Simon repenting of his wickedness, for he was in the "gall of bitterness" (cp. Heb. 12:15; Deut. 29:18). Such a man was Esau who traded the things of the Spirit for material gain (Heb. 12:16). He was said to be in "the bond of iniquity". Jesus came to open the prison of those that are "bound" by sin and iniquity (Isa. 61:1), but Simon had not come out of the prison of sin entirely.

With God, forgiveness is offered, but this is conditional on our attitude and willingness to change our ways (2 Tim. 2:24-26). Simon implored Peter to pray that the things Peter had threatened come not upon him (v. 24), but there is no evidence of a desire to inwardly reform.

THE TRUTH PREACHED TO AN ETHIOPIAN (Acts 8:25-40).

The apostles, as they returned to Jerusalem, preached in other villages of Samaria, complementing Philip's work. Philip meanwhile received a commission from an angel to go southward to a deserted section of the road to Gaza. In this desolate place he was directed to join an Ethiopian in a chariot (v. 29). He was a man of great importance, being in charge of the treasury of Queen Candace of Ethiopia, and was a eunuch, unmarried and unable to produce children.

This man had come in contact with the things of Israel and the covenants of promise, and though a Gentile he travelled to Jerusalem to worship at the feasts as a proselyte convert to the Law of Moses (v. 27).

As Philip joined him he was reading Isaiah 53, a passage of scripture which has puzzled natural Jews over the centuries, and was also causing him some consternation. In reply to Philip's question, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" he said, "How can I except some man should guide me" (vv.30, 31).

He asked Philip to come up into the chariot and sit beside him. He was reading from Isaiah 53 verses 7 and 8: "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth".

The eunuch desperately wanted to know of whom the prophet was speaking, himself or someone else. The eunuch felt a kindred spirit with the person in the passage; because this man, although unable to "declare his generation", would ultimately have a multitudinous seed, as Isaiah went on to say (Isa. 53:10, 11).

Beginning at the passage from which the Ethiopian was reading, Philip began to preach Jesus (v.35). How the Ethiopian's heart must have burned as Philip outlined the sufferings of Christ, the reasons for them, and how his sacrificial work would bring great benefits and salvation to many.

As the prophecy of Isaiah unfolds from chapter 53, it speaks of a great seed being developed from Zion, once barren (54:1-3); and of the sons of strangers, and **eunuchs** being blessed in the spiritual house which Yahweh is building through the work of Messiah (56:3-5).

As they travelled along and Philip unfolded the scripture from Isaiah 53:7 onwards, the eunuch became convinced of the Truth, having already an understanding of the fundamentals of Israel's Hope. Seeing an oasis of water in the desert, he eagerly asked Philip to baptize him (v.36).

Having confessed his faith in the things of Jesus Christ, the eunuch alighted from his chariot, and with Philip went down into the water to be totally immersed into the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (vv.37, 38) (Total immersion is evident from the record for it says: "they went **down** both **into** the water" and came "**up out of** the water").

The Spirit then caught Philip away to Azotus (i.e. Ashdod) and the eunuch went on his way rejoicing, southward to his homeland: there to spread the gospel further abroad.

LESSONS FOR US:

- Philip's preaching in Samaria is an example of the effect of the gospel on men and women who obey from the heart and believe the Word.
- Simon the sorcerer is an example of one more impressed with the miraculous and things external to the Word itself—he was prepared to trade in spiritual things to his own advantage. Peter's rebuke shows that such an attitude places a person in jeopardy of eternal destruction.

- Philip’s encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch shows how we can also be aided by others who may instruct us in the Word to greater understanding.
- Like the Ethiopian eunuch, we should not only know the facts of Christ’s sufferings and glory, but find a personal and joyful involvement with Christ.
- Complete immersion in water is necessary for baptism unto salvation.

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

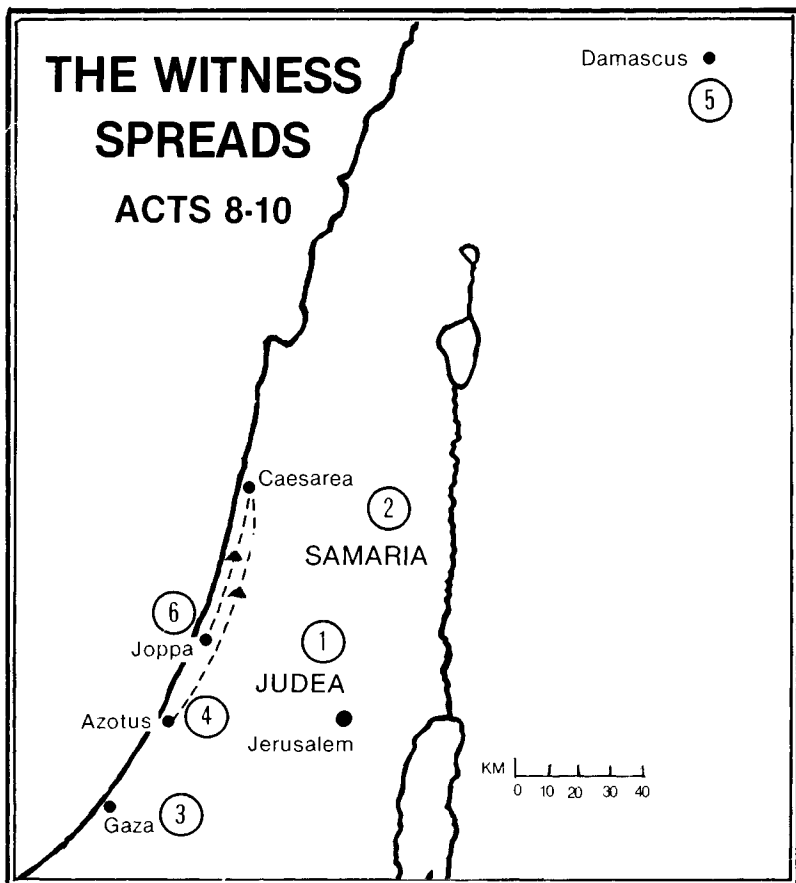
“The Story of the Bible” (H. P. Mansfield)—Vol. 13, Pages 56-64
 “Elpis Israel” (J. Thomas)—Part First, Ch. 4, “The Constitution of Righteousness”

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *What effect did Saul’s persecution of the ecclesias have on the spread of the gospel?*
2. *How was the Holy Spirit conferred upon believers?*
3. *Why was Simon the sorcerer rebuked by Peter?*
4. *What things does the incident of the Ethiopian eunuch teach us are necessary for salvation?*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *Describe Philip’s role in the spreading of the gospel after Stephen’s death.*
2. *What lessons do we learn from the attitudes of the Samaritans and Simon the sorcerer when Philip visited them?*
3. *What scripture was the Ethiopian eunuch reading when Philip met him and why did it become so meaningful to him?*



- (1.) As a result of the persecution of the ecclesia at Jerusalem, disciples are “scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria” (8:1).
- (2.) Philip the evangelist goes to Samaria preaching the gospel of the kingdom, followed by Peter and John (8:5, 13).
- (3.) Philip teaches and baptises the Ethiopian eunuch on the desert road from Jerusalem to Gaza (8:26).
- (4.) Philip is caught away from the Ethiopian eunuch and travels up the coast from Azotus to Caesarea, preaching everywhere the gospel (8:40; 21:8).
- (5.) Saul of Tarsus is stopped by the Lord Jesus Christ near Damascus on his journey of persecution (9:3).
- (6.) Peter is summoned from Joppa to Caesarea where he opens the door of faith to Cornelius and his household (10:1-6).

8. THE CONVERSION OF SAUL

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

There was a stark contrast between Philip the evangelist and Saul of Tarsus. At the same time that one was labouring amongst the Samaritans and an Ethiopian to build up the ecclesia, the other was relentlessly pursuing its destruction.

Yet there was also a similarity, for both men figured prominently in the spreading forth of the gospel. While Philip was at the forefront as the gospel edged out from Jerusalem and Judea to Samaria, it was the Apostle Paul, as Saul was subsequently known, who took the gospel to “the uttermost parts of the earth”.

The aim of this lesson is to see how the man for this work was prepared.

Acts 9:1-31

THE PREPARATION OF SAUL.

The world was never the same again after Saul was baptised and set forth to convert all men from paganism to Christ. Subsequent history would prove beyond doubt that the conversion of Saul marked a turning point in the world. With this, Scripture agrees, for no other event is referred to so frequently in the New Testament, except naturally the ministry of Christ.

For such a great work as preaching throughout the Roman world, an exceptional man was required. Though nobody realised at the time, God had for many years been preparing a man who would be equal to the task. As Paul himself later explained: “God separated me **from my mother’s womb**, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the nations” (Gal. 1:15-16).

Saul was born in Tarsus, one of the three most eminent university cities of the ancient world; the others being Athens and Alexandria. As the capital of Cilicia, it was mistress of a large and fertile territory and thus became a thriving commercial centre. The Romans, following the pattern set by the Greeks years before, gave Tarsus the privilege of being a free city. No wonder Paul could say: “I am a Jew, a man of Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city” (Acts 21:39).

Growing up in such a cultured city, Saul became familiar with the views of Greek philosophy, as he revealed when he confounded the Athenian wise men (Acts 17), and even disclosed a knowledge of the poets of his time (v.28). Both Greek and Hebrew would have been familiar languages to him (21:37, 40).

After receiving his early education in Tarsus from both Jews and Greeks, Saul was sent to Jerusalem to be trained at the feet of Gamaliel, who is described by Luke as “a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people” (5:34; 22:3). During that period,

Saul could have been looked after by his married sister if she, as seems possible, lived in Jerusalem (cp. 23:16). As time went on, Saul became more and more engrossed in affairs at Jerusalem, so that he could later say: “I profited in the Jews’ religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers” (Gal. 1:14).

The son of a Pharisee, he too was a Pharisee (Acts 23:6)—“the strictest party of our religion”, he called it (26:5 R.S.V.). He adhered rigidly to the requirements of the Law of Moses in accordance with family custom (2 Tim. 1:3), and as to the detail of the Law, was “blameless” (Phil. 3:6).

Everything in Saul’s experience fitted him for the work before him. By **birth a Roman**, by **education a Greek**, by **religion a Jew**, the dominant influences of the ancient world met in him.

SAUL—THE TYRANT OF JUDAISM (Acts 9:1-2).

Saul was also a person of rare determination. One writer describes him as “a very volcano of a man”. When he set himself to do something, he was absolutely resolute. This quality reflected itself in his persecution of Christ’s disciples, against whom he breathed out “threatenings and slaughter”. His full and firm conviction was that the new movement must, at all costs, be exterminated if the traditions of the fathers were to be upheld. He had turned his back on the advice of his teacher, Gamaliel, to let the disciples alone: “for if this plan or this undertaking is of men, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!” (5:38-39 RSV). Events were soon to show that Saul ignored this advice to his own peril.

Meanwhile Saul viewed with dismay the spread of the gospel to foreign cities and, in his mad fury, determined to root it out (26:11). Taking the initiative, he obtained letters from the high priests and Sanhedrin to the rulers of the Damascus synagogues, authorising him to seize the Christians, women as well as men, and bring them bound to Jerusalem (22:5; 26:12). A 500 kilometre round-trip to Damascus and back was nothing to the young Pharisee whose zeal for the Law of the fathers drove him relentlessly in his persecution of the ecclesia (Phil. 3:6; cp. Acts 22:3-4; John 16:2).

ON THE ROAD TO DAMASCUS (Acts 9:3-9).

After a long and tiring journey, Paul and his company came at last to the heights overlooking the city of Damascus. It was mid-day with the sun at its hottest and brightest, when a rest period would normally have been taken (22:6). But the determined Saul pressed on.

Suddenly an intense light shone upon them, brighter than the sun. Dazzled by the brilliance, they all fell to the ground. Then came a voice: “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” Saul gave an immediate and humble response. “Who art thou, Lord?” The answer came, “I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. It is hard for thee to kick against the goads”.

Jesus of Nazareth! The one whom Saul presumed dead! He was alive! Saul looked. There, in the midst of the light, stood a man whom Paul knew to be Jesus (cp. Acts 9:7-8 with 9:17; 22:14; 1 Cor. 15:8; 9:1). So Stephen was right after all! And if Stephen was right, Saul was wrong! Like a stubborn ox attempting to go in the wrong direction, he had been kicking against the goads.

Saul, trembling and astonished, said, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” The Lord replied, “Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do”.

Paul no doubt expected that his life would immediately be taken, but instead he was spared. The grace of God abounded towards him above all people — a fact which he never forgot (cp. Gal 1:15; 1 Tim. 1:12-14). Truly he could say, “For if, when we were **enemies**, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son . . .” (Rom. 5:10). He knew above all others that salvation depended on the grace of God and not works of the Law (Eph. 2:6-8).

Saul’s companions rose to their feet, but stood speechless. They had heard a sound, but had not been able to discern what was said (cp. 9:7 with 22:9). Neither had they seen any man. Then Saul arose from his prostrate position on the ground. Opening his eyes, he found he was blind and had to be led by the hand into Damascus. The great leader of the persecution, now helpless and in a shattered condition, was being led!

For three days Saul lived in a world of darkness, refusing both food and drink. Yet his mind would have raced with activity. The last sight he saw — the magnificent appearance of Jesus the Lord — would be locked up in his mind. Beholding this, Saul could see, as never before, his own absolute worthlessness. His terrible folly in destroying the things of the Truth flooded in upon him (cp. 1 Tim. 1:13). As he recalled prophecies he had previously memorised, he saw them in a new light. Though blind, Saul was now beginning to see.

THE VISIT OF ANANIAS (Acts 9:10-19).

As Saul meditated and prayed in one part of the city, he received a vision of a disciple named Ananias visiting him to restore his sight. About the same time, in another part of the city, Ananias received a vision to prepare him for his work. At first reluctant, no doubt because he knew of Saul’s impending visit and its ominous purpose, his fears were dispelled by the Lord saying, “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 show him how great things he must suffer for my name’s sake”. Saul, who previously caused others to suffer, was now to suffer himself.

Ananias went to Saul as Jesus instructed him so that Saul might have his sight restored and be filled with the Holy Spirit. Immediately, Saul’s blindness vanished. From his cell of darkness, he re-emerged into light. It was as if he had risen from death, and in a certain sense, he had done so. (The three-day period of blindness was a parallel to the Lord’s death). To

give expression to his new relationship, Ananias told him: “The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest. . .hear the voice of his mouth. For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard. And now, why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptised, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (22:14-16).

Putting aside the weakness he felt, Saul obeyed and was baptised.

SAUL BEGINS HIS WORK (Acts 9:20-31).

Straightaway Saul set out to rebuild the things he had before pulled down. He went into the very synagogues he had previously planned to visit, but for a very different reason. Now, as a changed man, he proclaimed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. The Jews were amazed at the complete reversal in attitude, but were unable to resist or in any way counter his arguments (vv.20-22).

During his time at Damascus, Saul felt the need for solitude that he might, by study, prayer and revelation, completely rethink his position and come to a finer understanding of the gospel. Accordingly he went into Arabia, and then back to Damascus (Gal. 1:16-17, 11-12).

The Saul who returned to Damascus was more mature than the one who had left. He now understood the wonder of Gentile inclusion into the family of God (Rom. 16:25-26; Eph. 3:1-6). He appreciated how the prophets had anticipated it in many of their statements, and he felt his own work before him had the full support of the Scriptures.

Again Saul visited the synagogues of Damascus, but as he preached Christ so the Jews became more and more furious. Finally, they could endure it no longer. They decided to put their tormentor to death. They sought and won approval of the city authorities for Saul’s arrest (2 Cor. 11:32). Day and night, guards watched the city gates to make sure that he could not get away. The “persecutor” had now become the “persecuted”. The disciples proved equal to the occasion, for one night, through the window of a house located on the city wall, Saul was lowered in a basket to the ground below, there to make good his escape.

This was a most humiliating experience for Saul which he never forgot (cp. 2 Cor. 11:33 and its context). He who had been honoured and prided himself in being “a Pharisee of the Pharisees”, now had to hide like a hunted criminal.

From Damascus, Saul made his way to Jerusalem. By now, it was the third year since he left Jerusalem on his mission of destruction. He thought the disciples would gladly receive him, but he was viewed with suspicion. It was not until the ever-thoughtful Barnabas took him in hand, that he was introduced to Peter and to James, the Lord’s brother (Gal. 1:18-19). For a time he enjoyed fellowship with the brethren there, but he could not remain silent, and soon was found disputing with the very men who had brought about the death of Stephen. Opposition against him mounted quickly (9:29). One day, while he was praying in the Temple, Christ appeared to him in a vision directing him to leave

Jerusalem and go to the Gentiles (22:17-21). Once more, with the aid of the brethren, Saul escaped to Caesarea, and was sent on his way to Tarsus, his home city.

Thus began what is probably the most exciting and adventurous preaching career ever recorded—Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles.

LESSONS FOR US:

- The dramatic conversion of such a determined and knowledgeable opponent of Christianity as Saul, provides strong evidence for the reality of Christ's resurrection.
- Although Saul had not persecuted him directly, Jesus asked "Why persecutest thou **me**?" The way we treat our fellow disciples is counted as the way we would treat Christ (Matt. 25:34-46).
- Saul the persecutor had caused others to suffer. As a disciple, he had to learn that all true disciples must themselves experience suffering and humiliation.

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"Conversion" (M. Purkis)—Pages 1-2

"Paul the Apostle" (W. H. Boulton)—Chapters 1-4

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *Tell what you know about Paul's life before his conversion.*
2. *What steps did Saul of Tarsus take to eradicate Christianity?*
3. *Describe briefly what happened to Saul on the road to Damascus.*
4. *Within the first three years of his conversion, Paul (then called Saul) was told on several occasions that his work would be among the Gentiles. Name these occasions.*
5. *In what way do the experiences of Paul demonstrate the truth of the resurrection of Christ?*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *There were several things about Saul (later called Paul) that fitted him for the task of being the Apostle to the Gentiles. What were they?*
2. *Describe the events which converted Saul the Persecutor to Christianity.*

9. CORNELIUS — THE FIRST GENTILE CONVERT

“God is no respecter of persons”

Paul had been commissioned by God to be Apostle to the Gentiles. Yet God, in His wisdom, chose one of the twelve, rather than Paul, to commence the work among the Gentiles.

So while Paul (or Saul, as he was then called) was being prepared for the work ahead of him, God sent Peter, who had already unlocked the door of the kingdom to the Jews on the day of Pentecost, to unlock the same door to the Gentile Cornelius.

Thus the way was opened for Gentiles to enter the Hope of Israel.

Our aim in this lesson is to see that God chooses men and women not on the basis of nationality, but on the basis of faith and righteousness.

Acts 10

TO THE GENTILES.

It had always been in God's purpose to bring the Gentiles within the sphere of His plan with the earth. Israel had been chosen from the beginning to be a “kingdom of priests”, so as to present God's truth to the world (Ex. 19:6). When the old man Simeon held the baby Jesus in his arms, he declared him to be “a light to lighten the **Gentiles**, and the glory of thy people **Israel**” (Lk. 2:32 cf. Isa. 42:6; 49:6-8). And before Jesus ascended into heaven, he commanded his disciples, “go ye therefore and teach **all nations**, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19).

Yet the Jews rarely appreciated their role. Over the centuries they had held themselves aloof from the world, regarding themselves as better than it. Even the apostles were not immune from this attitude and it was necessary for God to lead them step by step to break down the false notion of exclusiveness and the lingering prejudices of Judaism. First, the gospel had been preached to the racially-mixed Samaritans, then to a Gentile proselyte. Now the final step was to be taken by preaching to a Roman centurion.

THE VISION OF CORNELIUS (Acts 10:1-8).

Cornelius the centurion was clearly a Gentile, dwelling in Caesarea, the Roman headquarters in Palestine. Yet he had taken a great interest in the Jewish religion and was held in high esteem by all the nation of the Jews (10:22). The record in Acts reveals him as a “devout man”, with a God-fearing disposition, who prayed often, and who was generous in acts of compassion (vv.2-4, 35). It may be that he was the same centurion whose servant Jesus had healed a few years earlier, for both were noted for their good deeds to the Jews (cp. Lk. 7:5 with Acts 10:2). But whether this is so

or not, Cornelius had certainly instructed his household in the worship of the one true God (v.2).

He seems to have adopted the Jewish custom of praying at the ninth hour, i.e. 3 p.m. (cp. 3:1), for it was on one such occasion that he suddenly saw, in a vision, an angel coming to him and addressing him: "Cornelius!" (vv.3, 30). The man who could face an hundred enemies without fear, now was terrified before an angel of God. "What is it, Lord?" he asked. The angel replied: "Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: he lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side". The parallel account of this incident in Acts 11 adds the words: "Who (Peter) shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved" (11:14). In spite of Cornelius' godly character and good works, something else was required for salvation.

Immediately Cornelius sent two servants and a devout soldier to Joppa about 50 kilometres south, to the house of Simon the tanner.

THE PREPARATION OF PETER TO ACCEPT THE GENTILES.

The house of Simon was certainly a strange place in which to find Peter. Simon's very occupation would mean that on most days of the year he would be unclean according to the Law (Lev. 11:39). These regulations were given to Israel as an exhortation to holy behaviour (Lev. 11:44-45), but had become distorted, for the Jews concluded that they were all in the category of "clean animals", while the unclean animals were symbols of the Gentiles.

It was significant that Peter was staying with another Simon and that the name, "Simon called Peter" is repeated in Acts 10 (vv.5, 18, 32, RSV). Simon had confessed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God, upon which Jesus said, "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 16:17). "Simon Bar-Jona" spoke of his earthly descent, but Jesus had surnamed him "Peter" prophetically (Jn. 1:42). This name means a "stone" and hence this surname was prophetic of the foundationary work he would perform in the ecclesia after the Lord's death. In confessing that Jesus was Christ, he showed his great conviction, which was not "of flesh and blood", not humanly derived, but of God. He therefore merited his new name Peter and Jesus committed to him the keys of the "kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 16:18-19). In the course of time these keys were used. From Acts 2 we have learned that he unlocked the door of faith to the Jews on the day of Pentecost. Now he was about to use the other key to unlock the gospel to the Gentile, Cornelius.

On the day of Peter's great confession, Jesus not only called him **Simon** but "Simon **Bar-Jona**", or Simon, son of **Jonah**. In a sense, the mantle of the great prophet **Jonah** fell on Peter, for **Jonah** too preached first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles. Peter may well have been reminded of this, for the very port from which **Jonah** left (Joppa), was the place at which Peter was now staying!

THE VISION OF PETER (Acts 10:9-16).

Circumstances all combined to break down Peter's prejudice against the Gentiles, for although an apostle, he was still a Jew. But the greater preparation for his work came at noon on the day after the angel appeared to Cornelius. Peter was on the roof of Simon's house, praying. He became very hungry, but before he could eat, fell into a trance and saw a remarkable vision. It was as if the heavens opened and a huge sheet was let down by its four corners. As it was lowered, he saw that it was filled with all kinds of unclean beasts, birds and vermin. Then Peter heard a voice: "Rise, Peter; kill and eat". But Peter was appalled at such a suggestion; he preferred hunger to defilement. "Not so, Lord", he replied, "for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean". (Such a resistance was characteristic of Peter, e.g. Matt 16:22; John 13:8). Then the voice rebuked him, "What God has cleansed, that call not thou common".

To create emphasis, the request came three times, and three times Peter refused. (This was the third time that Peter experienced a threefold repetition, for he had denied his Lord three times and three times Jesus asked him, "Lovest thou me?"—Luke 22:54-62; John 21:15-17). Then the sheet was withdrawn into heaven.

TO CAESAREA AND CORNELIUS (Acts 10:17-28).

Peter was left in a quandary as no explanation was offered. But following hard on the vision, Cornelius' messengers arrived. God instructed Peter by the Spirit to go with them, assuring him that his doubts would be resolved.

When Peter asked the messengers why they had come, they replied that Cornelius "was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house, and to hear what you have to say" (10:22 RSV). Now the only thing that Peter could "have to say" to Cornelius was the Gospel. He himself reached the conclusion, for by the time he was received into the house of Cornelius at Caesarea two days later he knew the meaning of the vision. He was able to tell Cornelius and his household: "Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but **God hath showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean**" (v.28).

By now Peter appreciated the full significance of his mission. The Truth was about to be preached for the first time to Gentiles in the name of Christ Jesus! The turning point in the acts of the apostles had come.

SALVATION IS OFFERED TO THE GENTILES (Acts 10:29-48).

After giving his side of the story, Cornelius invited Peter to speak. Peter, who could now see the difference between the Law of Moses and Judaism, commenced his speech with a quotation from the Law itself to justify his action: "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons (cp. Deut. 10:17); but in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (vv. 34-35).

God is willing to receive all men unto Him — sin alone, and not nationality, separates men from Him (Isa. 59:1-2).

Peter continued his speech by saying that Cornelius knew the teaching of Jesus. He revealed how Jesus had been hanged on a tree and then raised by God on the third day, and had been seen by selected witnesses. Peter concluded: "And he (Jesus) commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick (living) and dead. To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins".

On the day of Pentecost, when Peter unlocked the kingdom to the Jews, he quoted from the prophet Joel: "**whosoever** shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (2:21). Now the thought is repeated, but with a much greater meaning, as Peter opens the kingdom to the Gentiles: "through his name **whosoever** believeth in him shall receive remission of sins": The term "**whosoever**" embraces Jew and Gentile (v.43; Rom. 10:12-13).

As on the day of Pentecost, when the apostles received the gifts of the Spirit, not by the laying on of hands, but direct from God, so now the Holy Spirit came directly on Cornelius and his household while Peter was still speaking (vv.44-46; 11:15). Peter, appreciating the significance of this, turned to the six Jewish brethren who accompanied him from Joppa and asked "Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptised, which have received the Holy Spirit as well as we?"

The case was overwhelming. There was no alternative. God was "taking out of the Gentiles a people for His name". So Peter "commanded them to be baptised in the name of the Lord" (v.48).

The door of the kingdom had been unlocked for the Gentiles. As the believers in Jerusalem later expressed it: "**Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life**" (11:18).

LESSONS FOR US:

- Good works, devotion and prayer are not of themselves sufficient for salvation.
- Salvation is only possible for those who believe the Gospel and are baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Then "good works" are important, for saints shall be judged according to their works (2 Cor. 5:10).
- There is no difference between Jewish and Gentile believers — they "are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28).

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

"Elpis Israel" (J. Thomas)—Part 2, Chapter 1, Pages 202-209

"The Story of the Bible" (H. P. Mansfield)—Vol. 13, Pages 81-88

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *Outline the character of Cornelius and state briefly what things he had to do in order to be saved?*
2. *Describe the vision which Peter saw on the roof-top of Simon the tanner's house in Joppa? What did it teach Peter?*
3. *How did Peter use the "keys of the kingdom" which the Lord had promised him after his great confession?*
4. *Summarise briefly the stages recorded in the book of Acts by which the preaching of the gospel was taken from the Jews to the Gentiles.*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *"God is no respecter of persons". How was this lesson impressed upon Peter at the conversion of Cornelius?*
2. *Relate the story of the conversion of the Gentile Cornelius.*

10. THE FIRST PREACHING CAMPAIGN: THE GOSPEL SPREADS AMONG GENTILES

“ . . . Which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians ”

With the baptism of Cornelius a precedent was established by Divine authority; the door of faith had been opened to the Gentiles. It was certain that others would follow; Peter had stated, “In every nation he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him” (10:35). In this lesson we see how the first predominantly-Gentile ecclesia was established at Antioch in Syria. Also, we see how Paul commenced to play a greater role by being brought into the work there. Antioch became an important centre and was the base from which the gospel was spread among the Gentiles.

Our aim in this lesson is to see the overshadowing hand of the Almighty bringing to pass His will in the calling of the Gentiles.

Acts 11:19-30

ANTIOCH: LITTLE ROME OF THE EAST.

Antioch was a large city of some half a million people and ranked as the third city in the Empire, after Rome and Alexandria. It was the capital of the East and the Roman pro-consul of the province of Syria lived in this beautiful metropolis. But its importance to us lies in the fact that from this city the gospel reached out to the Gentiles. Paul's three missionary journeys commenced from this city. Preaching began in Jerusalem and eventually reached Rome, but Antioch provided the bridge by which the Gospel advanced from the capital of the Jews to the capital of the Gentiles.

Geographically, Antioch was suited for this role. It lay on the north-western corner of the Mediterranean Sea, at the junction of the land masses of Palestine and Turkey. Although 25 kilometres inland, it was connected to the sea by the River Orontes and so was in touch with trade. The picturesque Orontes runs in the valley that divides the Taurus mountains in the north from the Lebanon range in the south. Through this gorge passed a large volume of trade with the great cities of the Mediterranean.

Its **population** was strikingly cosmopolitan. The majority of the population was Syrian but Greeks had ruled Syria for two centuries, and had stamped their language and culture upon the city and many had migrated to live there. The Romans were there as well as ruling overlords. Finally there was a large and influential Jewish sector, placed there originally by Seleucus, and now involved in the lucrative commerce of the city.

In **religion** the city was mixed. Beside the pagan gods of Greece and Rome, there were Chaldean astrologers and Jewish sorcerers. Much of the religion was immoral, especially that associated with Artemis and Apollo in the nearby centre of Daphne.

With its races, religions, immorality, wealth and pleasure-seeking,

Antioch reflected the life of Rome in the west.

Amidst all this the large **Jewish community** maintained its separation, conducting its life around the synagogues. Though discriminated against by the Greeks because of their religious exclusiveness and aloofness, the Jews were tolerated because their economic genius brought prosperity to the area. Attached to the synagogue worship were many proselytes who had been converted to Judaism (cp. 13:43, 50; 16:13; 17:4).

Here then in Antioch was the ideal seed-bed for the sowing of the Gospel. Within the ecclesia at Antioch were found many of the great problems that the apostle Paul would have to confront throughout his ministry in Gentile lands. Here Jews and Gentiles were brought together as one in Christ, despite their differences.

PREACHING TO GENTILES (Acts 11:19-21).

The great persecution of the Jerusalem ecclesia which followed the stoning of Stephen resulted in a wide-spread dissemination of the Word: "they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the Word" (8:4). This preaching extended as far north as Phoenicia (i.e. Tyre and Sidon, cp. 21:2-7), across the water to Cyprus and still further north to Antioch. Among these preachers were men of the island of Cyprus (4:36) and of the north African coast town, Cyrene (Matt. 27:32).

These men broke new ground for they spoke not only to Jews (v.19) but also to Greeks (v.20 RV). Divine approval was evident for men and women responded in large numbers, leaving the base society of Antioch and turning to the Lord: "the hand of the Lord was with them". This new ecclesia was different in that it was predominantly Gentile.

BARNABAS IS SENT FROM JERUSALEM (Acts 11:22-24).

We can imagine the keen interest with which news of the affairs at Antioch was received by the brethren in Jerusalem (11:1). As they had sent Peter and John into Samaria to appraise the work there, so they now sent Barnabas to review the situation in Antioch (cp. 8:14). The choice of only Barnabas indicates that they had accepted the call of the Gentiles (cp. 10:45; 11:18). His virtues are enumerated in verse 24, and he was known to the apostles for his peace-making qualities, for they had called him "the son of consolation" (4:36). He had brought Saul to the apostles when the greater portion of the disciples was prejudiced against him (9:26, 27). His largeness of heart and faithfulness to the truth were qualities required in Antioch at the time. Barnabas witnessed the faith, hope and love of the new brethren, who were Gentiles. He saw their unfeigned interest, their changed way of life and vital participation in the ecclesia's affairs. The grace of God was clearly with these Gentiles. The whole experience brought joy to the heart of Barnabas and he supported the work with great zeal. Understanding the potential causes of division in an ecclesia made up of Jews and Gentiles, he wisely exhorted them "that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord" (11:23).

BARNABAS BRINGS SAUL INTO THE WORK (Acts 11:25-26).

Many more were baptised into the Lord Jesus Christ while Barnabas continued at Antioch. So many new converts placed enormous pressure upon Barnabas and others; they had to preach the Word and edify the large, but young ecclesia. He knew about the Divine call of Saul and how he had been singled out by God to bear His name to the Gentiles (9:15, 27). Barnabas could see that Antioch was in need of a man of Saul's qualities. So Barnabas introduced Saul to the work at Antioch. For a whole year they laboured hard together and many more people were instructed in the Truth.

CALLED "CHRISTIANS" FIRST AT ANTIOCH (Acts 11:26).

The size of the large ecclesia in Antioch took the attention of the people of Antioch. The city was noted for its witty nicknames and they soon coined a name for this new body, namely "Christians" or "Christ-ones". It is notable that the disciples did not seek this name for themselves. In the Acts of the Apostles, as in the Epistles, we find the terms "brethren", "disciples", "believers", "saints" being used within the Body (e.g. Acts 5:14; 9:26, 32; Rom. 15:25; Col. 1:2). We can be quite sure that the term did not come from the Jewish community; "Christ" is the Greek equivalent of "Messiah", which they would not admit of Jesus of Nazareth. The Jewish term was "the sect of the Nazarenes" (Acts 24:5), for, as they taught, "no good thing comes out of Nazareth" (Jn. 1:46).

On the two other occasions when the name is found in the New Testament it is used by those without the Body, and is associated with suffering and ridicule. In Acts 26:28 Agrippa mocks Paul with the words, ". . . with but a little persuasion thou wouldest fain make me a Christian" (RV). Peter speaks of "suffering as a Christian", and urges the saints not to be ashamed in such a position (1 Pet. 4:16).

COLLECTION FOR THE POOR SAINTS OF JERUSALEM (Acts 11:27-30).

Jerusalem's continued interest in the new lampstand is further indicated by their prophets going down to visit Antioch. One of them was named Agabus (see also 21:10), and he prophesied that a great famine would come upon the Roman Empire (v.28). The whole ecclesia was moved and were concerned for the welfare of their much poorer "brethren" (and note the significant change from "disciples") in Judea. Jerusalem was economically depressed as it lay outside the trade routes, in inaccessible mountainous country. The hardship of brethren in Judea is implied in several other passages (viz. Acts 6:1; 24:17; Gal. 2:10; Rom. 15:27). Consequently those at Antioch contributed every man according to his ability, to a welfare collection which was taken by Barnabas and Saul to the elders at Jerusalem.

To Saul, this concept gave wonderful opportunities. When he arrived, the apostles discussed with him his role in preaching to the Gentiles while Peter attended to the Jews. Also they sought that he would remember the

poor of Jerusalem: "the same which I also was forward (RSV 'eager') to do", he wrote (Gal. 2:7-10). Why was he so eager? This he explains in Rom. 15:25-32: if the Gentile ecclesias could be moved to help in material things, then it was evidence to their Jewish brethren of their love in the Truth. Besides this the Gentiles had a sense of indebtedness to the Jews, for they had received from them the knowledge of the Truth (Rom. 15:27; Jn. 4:22). By the collection then, both groups were being united in a beautiful expression of mutual dependence. (Read also 2 Cor. 8 and 9).

PROGRESS DESPITE OPPOSITION (Acts 12).

So Barnabas and Saul fulfilled their charge and then returned to Antioch with a young man, John Mark, accompanying them. Yet in the meantime a terrible fear had taken hold of the ecclesia in Jerusalem. Herod Agrippa 1 had killed the apostle James, brother of John, and then imprisoned Peter (12:1-4). Through the power of prayer, Peter was delivered by the angel of the Lord and returned to the incredulous disciples gathered in the home of John Mark (12:5, 12, 13, 17). "The righteous is delivered out of trouble" (Prov. 11:8). Shortly after this Herod, infatuated by blasphemous flattery, was smitten by the angel of the Lord and he was "eaten of worms and gave up the spirit" (12:23). So the devourer of life was himself devoured, while Peter alive and free was hastening to another place to preach the Word of life. Again persecution aided the progress of the Gospel: "The Word of God grew and multiplied" (12:24).

LESSONS FOR US:

- God prepares His work well: everything necessary was waiting for the preaching work in Antioch.
- Brethren and sisters of faith find opportunity in the midst of opposition: since God is for us we must be optimistic.
- We must guard against prejudice blinding our involvement in God's work and preventing us using the abilities of brethren well-suited to varying tasks.
- The fervent prayer of righteous men avails much as was evidenced in Peter's release from prison.

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

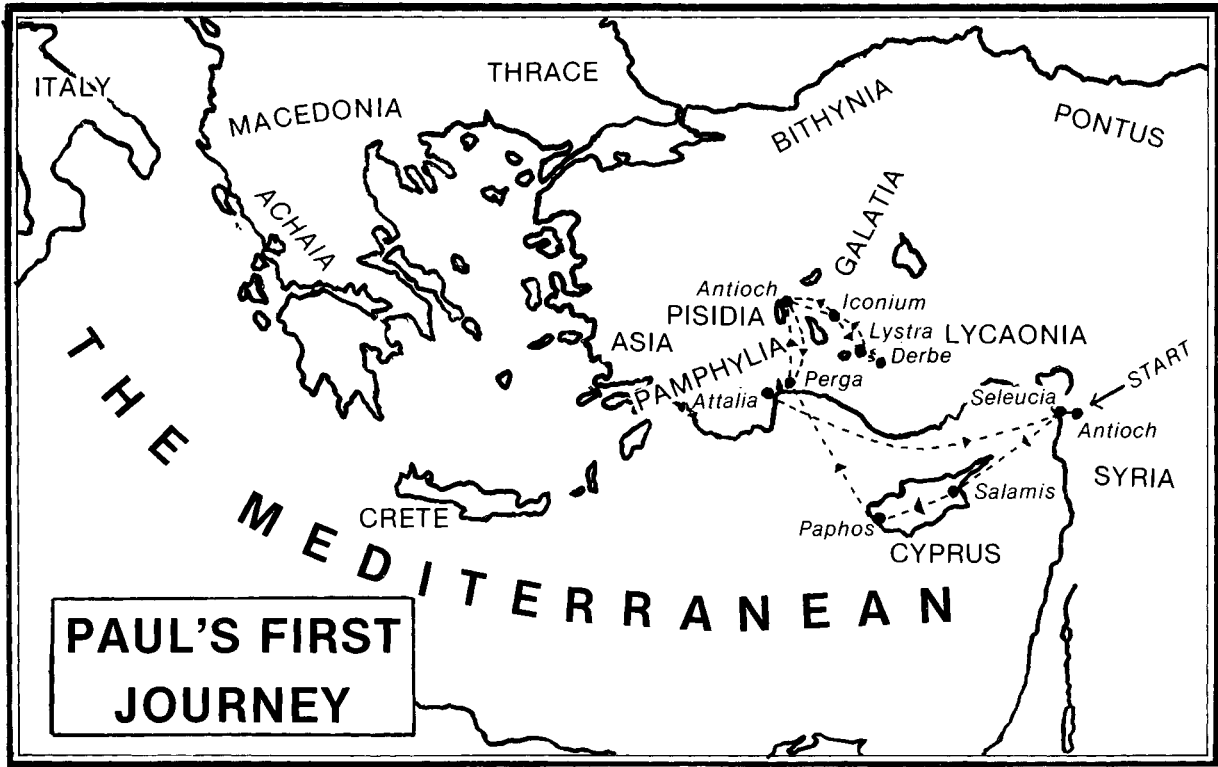
- "Paul the Apostle" (W. H. Boulton)—Chapter 5
- "The Letter to the Galatians" (J. Carter)—Pages 45-48
- "The Story of the Bible" (H. P. Mansfield)—Vol. 13, Pages 90-96

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *What significance is attached to the name "Christian" in the New Testament?*
2. *Write a paragraph on the character of Barnabas.*
3. *When was the collection for the poor saints at Jerusalem initiated and why did Paul support it so strongly?*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *Why was Antioch in Syria such a good centre for the extension of the gospel to Gentiles?*
2. *Why was Barnabas chosen to be sent from Jerusalem to review the new work at Antioch?*
3. *Write an essay on the significance of Antioch in Syria as far as the spreading of the gospel was concerned.*



**PAUL'S FIRST
JOURNEY**

11. ANTIOCH IN PISIDIA: “LO, WE TURN TO THE GENTILES”

“It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you”

The ecclesia of Antioch in Syria continued to grow with the assistance of the fervent group of prophets and teachers. A major initiative was then undertaken through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Barnabas and Saul were sent to foreign lands, to Cyprus, Pamphylia and Pisidia, where they preached in the synagogues of the Jews. Exasperated by the opposition of the Jews, Paul declared, “seeing ye put it from you . . . lo, we turn to the Gentiles.”

Acts 13

“SEPARATE ME BARNABAS AND SAUL” (Acts 13:1-3).

As the Antioch ecclesia grew, there developed also a powerful group of teaching brethren who were labouring together for the edification of the ecclesia and the extension of the gospel. In the list given to us in verse 1, it is interesting to note that Barnabas is mentioned first and Saul last. In the midst of their solemn worship, the Holy Spirit spake to them, “Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them”. Saul was brought into prominence by God for a new and important ‘work’. In the next two chapters the nature of this new ‘work’ is made clear: it was the preaching of the gospel in the lands of the Gentiles. At the end of the task, when Saul and Barnabas returned to Antioch, the record speaks of “the work which they fulfilled” (14:26; cp 13:41).

So Saul commenced the great commission for which he was chosen: “to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings and the children of Israel” (9:15).

PREACHING ON THE ISLAND OF CYPRUS (Acts 13:4-13).

Setting sail from Seleucia, Saul, in company with Barnabas and John Mark, crossed the sea to Cyprus. It will be remembered that it was the disciples of Cyprus who went first to Antioch (11:20). Also Barnabas was a native of Cyprus (4:36), and so the island was a natural starting point. Several important things in relation to the preaching to the Gentiles happened on this island:

1. Saul commenced his preaching in the synagogue of the Jews (v.5); this was his rule: “to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile” (Rom. 2:10). The Jews were familiar with the Law and the Prophets, which were the basis of Saul’s preaching (Acts 26:22).
2. Then at Paphos we have the first of several encounters between Saul and a sorcerer. It is clear from Luke’s record that Elymas enjoyed

considerable authority in the company of Sergius Paulus, the ruler of the island. When he saw that Saul's words were impressing his master, he feared his influence would diminish. Saul's appeal to reason was challenging the darkness of the pagan world and here strangely in a **Jewish** imposter! Appropriately God struck him with blindness, and he who had claimed supernatural power, himself sought someone to lead him! (13:11; cp. Eph. 4:17-18; 2 Cor. 4:3-4, 6). The prominence given in Acts to encounters with these evil men reveals their power over the society of those times (Acts 8:9-10, 18-24; 16:16-19; 19:13-17).

3. At Cyprus Paul, as Saul from then on was known, took the lead, his name being mentioned before Barnabas for the first time (13:13). Here we read of "Paul and his company", whereas before it was always "Barnabas and Saul" (11:30; 12:25; 13:2, 7). From Cyprus onwards Paul is almost always mentioned first. The Roman name 'Paul' is used rather than the Hebrew 'Saul' for now the apostle is moving through predominantly Gentile areas.

After the conversion of Sergius Paulus they sailed north-west to the city of Perga, capital of Pamphylia.

At this time John Mark departed from Paul and Barnabas. He returned to Jerusalem where his home was (v.13; 12:12). Paul viewed this departure as weakness and when Barnabas later "determined to take" Mark with them on their next journey, a sharp dissension arose between them and they decided to part and go separate ways (15:36-40). In later years John Mark regained the respect and praise of the Apostle Paul (e.g. Col. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:11).

ANTIOCH IN PISIDIA (Acts 13:14-15).

Derbe, Lystra, Iconium and Antioch formed part of the area known as "Galatia". This Antioch (not to be confused with Antioch in Syria; Lesson 10) was some 170 kilometres north of Perga and the route between the two cities was a narrow, tortuous path, through the steep slopes of the Taurus mountains. It was notorious for its wayside robbers (cp. 2 Cor. 11:26). Antioch was founded about 300 B.C. by the great builder of cities, Seleucus Nicator, the Macedonian King of Syria, who named it after his wife. When Paul and Barnabas entered the city they would have noted how much Rome had influenced the customs and way of life. It was also a busy metropolis lying on the route to Rome; traders from east and west passed through streets. As a consequence a large Jewish community resided there and the synagogue afforded Paul and Barnabas an ideal place to begin the preaching work. After the customary reading of the Law and the Prophets, Paul and Barnabas and fellow Jews were invited to speak "any word of exhortation for the people". Paul was not slow to seize the opportunity. The scene is like the occasion when Jesus read and preached in the synagogue at Nazareth (Lk. 4:16-30).

PAUL'S SPEECH IN THE SYNAGOGUE AT ANTIOCH (Acts 13:16-41).

We have only a summary of Paul's speech, but it is sufficient to show the main lines of his argument. There are similarities to the speeches of Peter (chapters 2 and 3) and Stephen (chapter 7); there was a unity of thought among the Apostles and thus a united witness.

Verses 16-21: Paul recounts the history of Israel from Moses to Saul. **"God chose our fathers and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt"**. This opening statement sets the theme for the address; namely, that **at every turn of the nation's history, God had provided for them**; but Israel showed consistent ingratitude to the revealed goodness of God. He "nursed them in the wilderness" (margin) for 40 long years. Despite Israel's waywardness, God nonetheless cast out the Canaanites and divided the land to the twelve tribes (v.19). "He gave unto them judges", but **"they desired a king"** (vv.20-21). In seeking Saul they made a grievous mistake, and **the same kind of mistakes had been repeated throughout their history.**

Verses 22-23: David was chosen **by God** to be king. Though he was driven into exile, he subsequently proved to be the finest of Israel's kings (v.22). History revealed that **God's choice was always best**, even though they had consistently refused it.

Why does Paul dwell on God's choice of leader? The answer is clear from what follows.

God had solemnly promised a Son to David (2 Sam. 7). At this point Paul introduces the name of **Jesus** as the promised seed of David. He was the Saviour of Israel, and **God's provision** for their needs. We can imagine how the apostle would use the Scriptures to show how the promise to David centred in Jesus. The fact that he belonged to the tribe of Judah, that his birth was attended with wonderful circumstances (Isa. 9:6-7; 7:14), that the town of Bethlehem was the scene of his birth (Mic. 5:2), would all contribute to the evidence that he was the seed of David and the Son of God, as the covenant to David required (2 Sam. 7:12-16).

Verses 24-25: Furthermore Jesus was witnessed by John the Baptist. All Jewry held John to be prophet (Matt. 21:26), so his witness to Jesus would be respected (cp. Jn. 5:32-35). He was the forerunner and he declared the imminent appearance of Messiah; the one promised must have come.

Verse 26: All Paul's audience in the synagogue, both Jews and Gentiles, were invited to consider the issues of salvation! They could not be ignored.

Verses 27-29: Jesus' death and burial fulfilled the Scriptures. His crucifixion was said by the **Jews** to nullify his claim to be Messiah, but Paul argues just the reverse — that the Scriptures required that Messiah be slain of men. Passages like Isa. 53, Psalms 22 and 69 would have been quoted here. Ignorance of the real meaning of the Prophets had led to fulfilment of them.

Verses 30-33: Jesus' resurrection likewise fulfilled Scripture. This is the

climax of Paul's argument; **the gospel of salvation rested on the fact that God had raised him from the dead.** There were many witnesses to the undeniable fact (v.31). The message therefore was momentous and wonderful. God had remembered His covenant and raised up a Son of His own, just as He said He would in Psalm 2:7.

Verse 34: This raised Jesus now has eternal life and will not see corruption. The "sure mercies of David" involve **resurrection** and an **everlasting** covenant: without resurrection the promise to David could never be fulfilled (2 Sam. 7:16; Isa. 55:3).

Verses 35-37: Finally Paul uses Psalm 16:10 to show that Messiah had to be a resurrected man, and one raised soon after death, before corruption had set in. This could never refer to David but is answered in the facts concerning Jesus (cp. Peter's identical usage of Psalm 16 in Acts 2:25-31).

Verses 38-39: Forgiveness of sins was preached in the name of Jesus Christ. Now that he has ascended to the right hand of God, he is the high priest ready to save his people by mediating on their behalf (cp. Psa. 110:1-3). This "forgiveness" or salvation was only for those who **believed**. A humble submission to God was required, not the pursuit of merit and works of Law, which could never make a man worthy of salvation. Here we have the great doctrine of "Justification by Faith", which is the central theme of much of Paul's later writings, especially of his letter to the Galatians (see Lesson 21).

Verses 40-41: A dire warning was given! Perhaps Paul observed a resistance in his audience, for he ended his address with a terrible warning from the prophet Habakkuk (1:5).

THE SEQUEL—A DOOR OF FAITH OPENS TO GENTILES (Acts 13:42-52).

The powerful reasoning of the address produced a deep impression upon both Jews and Gentiles. They earnestly sought a further address the following Sabbath. Many would not wait until then, but remained with the brethren for further instruction.

When the following Sabbath came and almost the whole city assembled to hear them, the Jewish leaders were envious and opposed the work, contradicting and blaspheming the word spoken. Paul would have no part of such proceedings. He drew attention to the words of Isa. 49:6, which required the salvation of God's servant to go to the Gentiles. He said: "Lo, we turn to the Gentiles" (v.46). The Jews determined to thwart Paul's influence; they used their influence to rally opposition to Paul and Barnabas, who found themselves subjected to extreme pressures. Finally the Roman authorities, usually tolerant of religion, were called in. They saw the matter as a fanatical religious controversy, and as the problem began with the arrival of Paul and Barnabas, the solution, they thought, lay in their expulsion from their city. But the disciples were filled with joy at the great work that had been accomplished.

LESSONS FOR US:

- Where the word of God is proclaimed fervently, new opportunities to preach will be found.
- The philosophers of this world seek to influence our minds and pervert us from the right ways of the Lord. Paul's attitude of mind to Elymas is a lesson in resistance.
- We can read the Scriptures daily yet fail to perceive their message or be moved by their appeal (v.27). Our minds and hearts must be in our reading.
- Preaching work is hard work and needs courage and perseverance (vv.13, 45, 50), yet its results can bring joy (v.52).
- Justification by faith, not works of law, allows a man to approach unto God.

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

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“Paul: The Traveller and Roman Citizen” (Ramsay)—Pages 74-85

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *Tell the story about Elymas the sorcerer recorded in Acts 13.*
2. *What happened to John Mark during Paul's first journey and what did Paul subsequently think of him? What lessons can we learn from this?*
3. *What was the effect of Paul's preaching in the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia?*
4. *How did Paul, in the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia, prove from Psalm 16 that Messiah had to be a resurrected man?*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *What were the significant features of the preaching of Barnabas and Paul in Cyprus?*
2. *Summarise briefly Paul's address in the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia.*

12. PERSECUTION IN GALATIA

“We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom”

In the latter years of the Apostle Paul's life he wrote to Timothy concerning the work of preaching the Truth. Reflecting upon his life's experiences, he especially remembered the bitterness of the opposition he found in the Galatian cities “. . . persecutions, afflictions which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra . . .”. Again, when writing to the Corinthians he states, “Once was I stoned”. It was at the town of Lystra that this event occurred. So in this lesson we see the apostles in the fires of controversy on behalf of the Name of Christ.

In this lesson our aim is to take courage from the apostles' faithful perseverance, rejoice with them in the deliverance that God provided, and admire them for the thorough and sound way they established the ecclesias in the faith.

Acts 14

A LONG TIME IN ICONIUM (Acts 14:1-6).

After being expelled from Antioch at the instigation of the Jews, Paul and Barnabas made their way to Iconium which, like Antioch, was on the main trade route, some 150 kilometres to the east. According to the principle, “to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile”, they visited the synagogue. There a great multitude of Jews and Gentiles believed. The situation in Iconium was similar to that in Antioch where a large number of proselytes from the Gentiles worshipped at the synagogue, and through this means heard the apostles speak (cp. Acts 13:42, 44). Again the jealousy of the unbelieving Jews thwarted the preaching work (cp. 13:45, 50). The influence exerted by the relatively small Jewish communities in the cities of the Roman world is a feature of the Book of Acts (cp. 14:5, 19; 17:5, 13). Judaism had attracted a large number of “devout women”, among whom were often found the wives of the principal men of the cities (e.g. 13:50; 17:4, 12). Whilst this sometimes brought a backlash of hatred upon them, it also added to their influence. We shall see further evidence of this influence in this chapter.

Some months were spent in Iconium and the Lord Jesus Christ supported their preaching by granting miraculous power to the apostles. Their preaching is described as “the word of his grace”; that is, salvation through the grace of God, given upon their faith in Christ. “By grace are ye saved through faith”, Paul writes (Eph. 2:8), in sharp distinction to the Jewish doctrine of justification through works of law (cp. Acts 13:39). The miracles from the Lord confirmed beyond dispute that the Apostles' word had God's approval (cp. Gal. 3:5).

Nevertheless the unbelieving Jews were successful in dividing the public's response to the Gospel of Christ. Some of the rulers of the city corroborated with the Jews to bring about a riot against the apostles with

the object in mind of stoning them to death. However, news of their intentions reached Paul and Barnabas, and they hastened to other cities, in accord with the advice of Christ (Matt. 10:23). As Paul fled from the city he must have reflected upon his own treatment of Stephen, who died by stoning when he and his fellow-Jews "could not resist the wisdom and power with which he spoke". Now the suffering he gave others was recoiling upon his own head (Acts 9:16; 7:58).

HEALING THE LAME MAN IN LYSTRA (Acts 14:6-10).

Lystra was 27 kilometres from Iconium and, with Derbe, belonged to a more primitive area called Lycaonia. The Gospel was preached there but without much success. The people were barbarian, though Roman colonisation had by then made quite an impression. Neither Lystra nor Derbe seem to have had a Jewish synagogue, so for the first time the apostles commenced their preaching work in a purely Gentile setting.

Interest in Paul's message was greatly increased by a startling miracle of healing. There was a man in Lystra who had been lame from birth. He was prudent and as he hearkened to the words of the apostles he became convinced of their truth. Paul perceived the faith of this man and was minded to heal him. With a loud voice he proclaimed, "Stand upright on thy feet!" Immediately he was healed, and he leaped and walked. In the streets of Lystra there had now been seen the same power that gave joy at the pool of Bethesda (Jn. 5:8-9), and later, at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple (Acts 3:7-9).

THE APOSTLES HONOURED (Acts 14:11-14).

The barbarians were incredulous. Never had a miracle been witnessed in their city and so they ascribed it unto their "gods", who had come to them in the human forms of Barnabas and Paul! The city was regarded as being under the protection of 'Zeus' (RV) or Jupiter (the Roman name), the chief of the gods, whose messenger was 'Hermes' (RV) or Mercury. From verse 13 it seems that a temple to Zeus had been erected outside the city. So Barnabas was called Jupiter for in the peoples' eyes he more closely resembled their image of Jupiter, while Paul fitted the role of speaker on behalf of Jupiter, so was called Mercury (v.12).

So great was the impact upon the people of Lystra that a sacrificial procession was organised and was now proceeding to the gates of the city to make offering unto the apostles! The Lycaonians had their own language, and until now Paul and Barnabas had not understood their intention. They were shocked to discover that the miracle intended to advance the cause of Christ was now being used to promote paganism! The apostles acted swiftly. They rent their clothes and ran in among the people crying out their protest against this ignorant sacrilege.

PREACHING TO PAGANS (Acts 14:15-18).

It is interesting to note the contrast between the brief speech to these pagans and the longer address in the synagogue of the Jews in Antioch

(ch. 13). Although the Old Testament forms the basis of his words, there is no reference to it or to the history of Israel as these people knew nothing of them. Nevertheless the apostles appealed to the works of creation, where the wisdom and power of God combine so beautifully to declare His glory to all men. The speech has the following main points:

1. Paul and Barnabas were not gods, but “men of like passions with you”.
2. The power they had exercised in healing the lame man was from the living God (cp. 3:12-16).
3. Their mission was to preach that men should turn from futile idolatry to the living God.
4. The living God was the Creator, who made heaven and earth and the sea and all living creatures in them (Psa. 146:6; Acts 17:25-28).
5. In earlier times God had allowed the nations to go their own way, for He had revealed Himself only unto Israel (Psa. 147:19-20; Amos 3:2), but now was appealing to all peoples (cp. Acts 17:30).
6. Yet the evidence of the One Creator they were now called upon to worship, was always there in the ordered cycle of the seasons, where rain and sunshine brought abundant harvests to mankind to satisfy their needs and cause them joy of heart (Psa. 104:13-15, 27-28). Receiving such kindness from the living God, it was incumbent upon man to respond to His love (cp. Rom. 1:18-20).

This appeal was therefore directed to those natural evidences of God’s hand, which were familiar to them. Often their own religious festivals, with feasting and gladness, were expressions of gratitude for the harvest of the earth (cp. Psa. 24:1). Thus Paul appealed to them to recognise the true source of such gifts.

STONED AT LYSTRA (Acts 14:19-20).

Some short time later a number of Jews from Antioch and Iconium arrived on the scene. They sensed the resentment of the people against the apostles and quickly used the opportunity to stir up a violent attack against the preachers. The emotions of the Lycaonians were aroused and Paul was stoned. He lost consciousness and they dragged him out of the city “supposing he had been dead”. Having failed to destroy Paul in Iconium, they thought they had succeeded in Lystra (cp. v.5).

Verse 20 introduced us to the disciples of Lystra. The preaching of the apostles had been blessed and a number of humble disciples had been baptised into the saving Name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now they stood in horror and grief over the blood-stained body of the one who had brought them the message of love and life. With great boldness and loyalty the disciples stood about the prostrate and lifeless body of the apostle they loved and admired. Then remarkably they saw him stir and rise up on to his feet. It must have been like witnessing the resurrection; his battered, bruised body filled with life and became active once more

through the power of God (cp. Gal. 3:1). With unquenchable determination, Paul led the disciples back into the city, and after spending one further evening with them, departed for Derbe.

TIMOTHY — A SON IN THE FAITH.

Timothy was already a disciple when Paul came to Lystra on his second visit (16:1). Paul terms him “my own son in the faith” (1 Tim. 1:2), which means that Paul must have converted Timothy on this first visit to Lystra. Very probably the young man Timothy was among the disciples that stood around the stoned body of their friend. With what power would Paul’s later words come home to this young man: “Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ . . . thou hast **fully known** my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, **persecutions, afflictions**, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at **Lystra**: what persecutions I endured: but out of them all **the Lord delivered me.**” (2 Tim. 2:3; 3:10-11).

In witnessing the power of the Lord triumph in the face of opposition and persecution, the young man Timothy saw an inspiring example which he never forgot; his dedication to the Gospel in later years shows this to be so.

THE VISIT TO DERBE (Acts 14:20-21).

Derbe was another town of the region of Lycaonia and some 65 kilometres east of Lystra. Many people became disciples here. Notable among them was Gaius, who later became one of Paul’s travelling companions and a representative of the ecclesias of Galatia (20:4).

CONFIRMING THE BELIEVERS (Acts 14:22-24).

With the work at Derbe completed, the apostles felt the need to revisit and consolidate the ecclesias established during the course of their journey. Thus, Paul and Barnabas retraced their steps through Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, undaunted by the opposition and persecution they had experienced at most of the centres during their forward journey (cp. 2 Tim. 3:11). The apostles knew that those who had newly been converted to the Gospel of Christ needed to be given further instruction in the things of God. It was this aspect of the work that received their attention on their return journey. Paul’s own experiences illustrated his exhortation that they must “continue in the faith” whatever the opposition; he told them “we must **through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of God**” (v.22).

The same warning and exhortation has been passed on to us (Rom. 8:17; 1 Thess. 3:4; 2 Tim. 1:8; 2:11, 12; 1 Pet. 4:12-16; Rev. 7:14). The tribulations we are called on to endure may not take the same form as Paul’s, but they exist nonetheless, only in a more subtle guise (cp. 2 Tim. 3:1-5; Lk. 21:34-36). Whatever the pressures may be, they can be successfully overcome by building up within ourselves our defence—faith in God and His Word.

HOME TO SYRIAN ANTIOCH (Acts 14:25-28).

From Antioch in Pisidia the brethren made their way via Perga, where they preached the Word (having only passed through on their forward journey), and Attalia, its seaport, and then they sailed to Antioch. Upon their arrival, the ecclesia was gathered together and received with interest the report from Paul and Barnabas concerning their journey. Approximately two years had passed since they left and there was much to tell. 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”**.

LESSONS FOR US:

- Those who preach the Word cannot expect armchair comforts. The Truth demands activity and sacrifice.
- The preacher of the Gospel must adapt his approach according to the background knowledge and circumstances of his audience.
- The wonderful cycle of the seasons is a silent yet eloquent witness to the existence of the only Living God. Men therefore have no excuse for rejecting God.
- Young men and women are wise to take to themselves the example of faithful brethren.
- The road to the Kingdom is not an easy route: **“We must through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of God”**. But faith can conquer opposition and convey us forward, despite sickness or the injuries of spiteful men.

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

- “The Story of the Bible” (H. P. Mansfield)—Vol. 13, Pages 110-119
“The Letter to the Galatians” (J. Carter)—Pages 61-62
“Paul the Apostle” (W. H. Boulton)—Chapter 7
“Paul: The Traveller and Roman Citizen” (Ramsay)—Pages 107-124

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *What kind of people lived in the region of Lycaonia? What did they think of Paul and Barnabas?*
2. *The people of Lystra knew neither the Old Testament nor the history of Israel. How then did Paul show to them the existence of God?*
3. *Where was Paul stoned and how did this come about?*
4. *What was the main purpose in Paul and Barnabas retracing their steps during their first journey to Galatia?*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *“We must through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of God”*

(Acts 14:22). Explain how Paul and Barnabas' journey to the Galatian cities of Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe illustrates the meaning of this principle.

- 2. Outline the main points of the apostles' address to the idolatrous people of Lystra. What do we learn from them?*
- 3. Briefly recount the events that took place on Paul's first missionary journey.*

13. THE JERUSALEM CONFERENCE

“Through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved”

Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch, the place of their home ecclesia, following their first missionary journey. They rehearsed to the ecclesia “all that God had done with them, and how He had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles” (Acts 14:27). This created in their midst a contention which, though officially settled at the Jerusalem Conference, was to follow closely the steps of the Apostle from that day forth.

The aim of this lesson is to understand why Judaism was incompatible with the Gospel of Christ and to understand the reasons for the decrees which were issued by the Jerusalem Conference.

Acts 15:1-35

THE ISSUE.

The nation of Israel was elected by God as His firstborn son among the family of nations (Ex. 4:22). They were a peculiar treasure unto Him and had exclusive privileges (Ex. 19:5-6; Rom. 9:3-5). If any wanted to find acceptance before God, they had to embrace the hope of Israel and come under the Law of Moses. This was the position before Christ came. But the Jews had added the tradition of the elders to the Law of Moses (Matt. 15:3-9; see Lesson 13, Stage 4). In this way the Law had become corrupted and a burden. The Scribes and Pharisees who professed to uphold it became self-righteous and scornful of others. The result was that the Gentiles were looked on as inferior and few partook of the hope of Israel.

During his ministry Jesus indicated clearly that the Jewish view of privilege could not be justified or maintained. He declared that “God so loved **the World**, that He gave His only begotten Son, that **whosoever believeth** in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (Jn. 3:16). Before his ascension, he commanded his disciples to “go into all the **World** and preach the gospel to **every** creature. He that **believeth** and is baptised shall be saved” (Mk. 16:15-16; cp. Matt. 21:43; 22:9-10; 24:14; Lk. 2:32; Isa. 49:6). The commandment was clear. Belief in the gospel followed by baptism was what God required of all men for salvation.

But when Paul reported the conversion of the Gentiles without requiring their submission to the Law of Moses and the rite of circumcision, contention between Paul and the Judaisers was inevitable. It soon erupted.

PEACE AT ANTIOCH DISTURBED BY JUDAISERS (Acts 15:1-5).

A great company of priests had been obedient to the faith (Acts 6:7), and certain of the sect of the Pharisees were numbered among the believers (Acts 15:5). Some of these had travelled to Antioch and opposed Paul (Gal. 2:12-13). They said “**except** ye be circumcised . . . ye

cannot be saved”, and they contended it was **necessary** to “keep the law” (Acts 15:1, 5, 24).

Paul’s view and their view were diametrically opposed.

Paul said that salvation was a matter of the grace of God for **all**, Jew or Gentile, who believed and were baptised (cp. Eph. 2:8-10). The Judaisers said that, besides this, both circumcision and the Law had to be observed: in other words, justification from sins depended upon man’s ability to fulfil the works of the Law.

So serious was the issue that it was resolved that Paul and Barnabas should go up to Jerusalem to the Apostles and elders to settle it. The demand to observe the Law directly challenged Paul’s work among the Gentiles which, however, had been manifestly blessed by God. The outpouring of Holy Spirit power had always been accepted as God’s seal upon the work of the apostles (Acts 14:3), and it had been given on the basis of faith not the Law (Gal. 3:2). So as Paul and Barnabas went on their way to Jerusalem, they “declared the conversion of the Gentiles” to the mixed ecclesias of Phoenicia (Phenice) and Samaria and thus brought much joy to them.

When they arrived at Jerusalem Paul revealed the wisdom that had been imparted to him. At a meeting with the ecclesia and the apostles and elders they declared “all things that **God had done** with them”. They emphasised God’s part in their work among the Gentiles—they were merely His agents. It was a complete answer to those who desired to add “law” to “faith”. Paul’s words provoked opposition. The believing Pharisees insisted that the Law and circumcision were “**needful**”. Accordingly a conference was convened to deal with the question.

THE JERUSALEM CONFERENCE (Acts 15:6-21).

The matter was greatly disputed, the Judaisers arguing that the Law was of God and was the foundation of the nation’s civil and religious code; that it had been so for 1,500 years and could not be set aside; that circumcision was “forever”—issues answered by Paul’s letters to “Galatians” and “Romans”.

The dispute continued until Peter arose to address the meeting, the first of four principal speakers. Upon his forthright confession that Jesus was “the Christ, the Son of the Living God”, the Lord had conferred upon Peter “the Keys of the Kingdom” (Matt. 16:19). It was Peter, at Pentecost, who had stated the formula for salvation (Acts 2:38). Later again, he had been the one chosen by God to preach “words whereby” the house of the first Gentile convert Cornelius “might be saved”. This event settled for ever the question of Jewish exclusiveness. It had taken three identical visions to convince Peter that “what God hath cleansed, call not thou common”. Only then had Peter’s Jewish prejudice been submerged. The Spirit was given from heaven upon all the Gentiles in Cornelius’ house who heard and believed the Word. Clearly, “**whosoever** (Jew and Gentile) believeth in him shall receive remission of sins”. Peter had unlocked the “door of faith unto the Gentiles” and they

were baptised. God, who knew their hearts, “put no difference” between Jew and Greek.

In the face of this, to require observance of the Law by Gentiles, was to tempt God (v.10). The Law was a burden to the Jews; it could not be kept and so it “made” them a nation of sinners (Gal. 5:1; Matt. 23:4). Justification was by faith in Christ through the grace of God. If then while seeking to be justified by Christ, they were convicted as sinners, in effect Christ was the “minister of sin” (Gal. 2:16-21). Here was confusion. The grace of God was “frustrated” or neutralised. How unthinkable to limit the love of God like this! Thus Peter reasoned.

The second and third speakers, Paul and Barnabas rose to confirm what Peter had said. They stated that God had approved the conversion of Gentiles “by miracles and wonders” (cp. Acts 14:27; 15:3, 4; 2:22; Heb. 2:4). Would God’s blessing abide with those he did not approve of?

It was left to James, the fourth speaker, to summarise the discussion. His stature appears from the fact that he was the President of the Conference who gave the ruling (vv.19-21). That the ruling was accepted is seen from the fact that it was repeated in the letter sent out (v.29).

James combined Peter’s evidence (vv.7-11, 14), with the voice of the Prophets (vv.15-18)—weighty evidence in the ears of the disputants. His opening sentence comprises an epitome of the Book of Exodus: “Simeon (Peter) hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name” (v.14). James saw the call of the Gentiles as a repetition of the call of Israel out of Egypt. That call had entailed **visitation, invitation, separation, education and dedication**. These are five essential steps to the Kingdom of God that **all** must take. He also referred to at least three of the Prophets:—

1. **Jeremiah 12:15**: “After this I will **return** (the words quoted in Acts 15:16), and have compassion on them (Judah’s “evil neighbours”—Gentiles, v.14) . . . and **build** them in the midst of my people”. Here was a prophecy which plainly spoke of **grace** upon the nations who became obedient to the Truth.
2. **Amos 9:11-12**: This prophecy speaks of the restitution of the “Tabernacle of David”. This term is used because Gentiles were freely admitted in the days of David into worship. The prophecy of Amos also speaks of the residue of men seeking the Lord at Christ’s return, as well as “the Gentiles upon whom my name **hath been called**” (Rotherhām). This presupposes that when the Kingdom is established, there will be Gentiles **already bearing** the name of God. There must be a period before this then, when God would “take out of the Gentiles a people for His name”. Peter and Paul’s experiences were consistent with the voice of God in the Prophets.
3. **Isaiah 45:22**: Isaiah spoke of a day when **every** knee would bow to Christ and find righteousness in Yahweh (cf. v.23; Rom. 14:11-12). In anticipation of this, he calls to Gentiles, “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the **ends** of the earth”. James spoke of the Gentiles who

had answered this call and “**turned** to God” (Acts 15:19). Moreover the words of Acts 15:18 are also in essence the words of Isaiah 45:21.

James concluded that, in the circumstances of the times, there were four things that could be asked of Gentile brethren (vv. 19-20). But circumcision and the Law were not numbered among those things essential for salvation.

THE FORMAL DECREE OF THE COUNCIL (Acts 15:22-29).

James’ judgment was accepted. The teachings of the Judaisers lacked the endorsement of the Apostles and Elders. There were four “necessary things” enjoined upon the Gentile believers **for the time then present**. They were encouraged to heal the breach by abstaining from:

1. **Meats offered to idols:** Probably this was for the reason given in 1 Cor. 8:10. In freely partaking of meats offered to idols, a stumbling block could be cast before the weak. Though an idol was “nothing in the world” and no meat was unclean of itself, if a “weak brother” had a conscience toward either and followed the example of a “strong brother”, then he would sin. Thus, “through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died” (1 Cor. 8:11). The proper course was to abstain.
2. and 3. **Things Strangled and Blood:** The partaking of such was strictly forbidden in the Law (Lev. 17:10-14). Ingrained conscience made it repugnant to the Jew. As the ecclesias were mixed communities it was best for the sake of peace to maintain this restraint. Note the close connection with Jewish feeling (vv.20-21). It was therefore only a temporary concession to the Jews in the circumstances of those days, and is no longer an obligation. Regard for the conscience of others is constantly counselled by the Apostles.

It is **not** now “defiling” to have blood transfusions, as the Jehovah Witnesses teach. Jesus enunciated the principle, “whatsoever thing from without entereth into the man, it **cannot** defile him . . .” (Mk. 7:18-23).

4. **Fornication:** This is a permanent injunction which was doubtless made in view of the general acceptance of this vice in the world outside. God’s law has not changed though man’s convention has. Let those beware who practice such things in the “permissive age” of the 20th century. “Be not deceived, neither fornicators . . . shall inherit the Kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 6:18; cp. Matt. 5:27-30; Heb. 12:16; 13:4; Rev. 21:8).

The conference over, Paul and Barnabas, accompanied by Silas and Judas, returned to Antioch with the letter. When the ecclesia heard its contents they rejoiced, as well they might, for there were many Gentiles at Antioch (Acts 11:20-21). Paul took this message with him on his next missionary journey. It was an added witness to God’s approval of His gospel (16:4-5).

THE LAW AND CHRIST.

The Law of Moses served two purposes:—

1. **A Negative Purpose:** It convinced men they were sinful creatures and thus in need of redemption: it made men “guilty before God” and thus “worked wrath” (Rom. 3:19-20; 4:15; Gal. 3:19).
2. **A Positive Purpose:** It directed attention to the coming Saviour. It “was a schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ”, said Paul (Gal. 3:24). The ritual of the Tabernacle, the Sacrificial Code, etc., all directed attention to the promised seed (Gal. 3:21-25).

It was thus a wonderful divine institution for “the time then present”. It “was holy, and just, and good” (Rom. 7:12). While convincing man of his sinful state, it did not leave him in a state of hopelessness. It was intended that the Israelite should seek God’s salvation in Christ, which was to be revealed at the “time of reformation” (Heb. 9:10). It did all it could to save men. In this way it was “ordained to life” (Rom. 7:10).

There are **two** reasons why the Law could not give life, namely:

1. The Law was weak through the flesh, i.e. because flesh could not keep it. It thus convicted men of sins and condemned them to death.
2. Even if it was kept perfectly, it could not give life, for there never was a law given that could (Rom. 8:3; Gal. 3:21, 2:16; Ps. 143:2). Salvation is by grace through faith. Striving to keep the Law resulted in a generation of boastful hypocrites whose religion was centred on human achievement. Such cold formalism was abhorrent to God.

Christ is the “end of the law for righteousness to all who believe” (Rom. 10:4). He was a man who kept the Law but was cursed by it in the manner of his death (Gal. 3:13). When the Law cursed an innocent man, its end was due. In this way the Giver of the Law to Israel rescinded it. This permitted the “blessing of Abraham to come on the Gentiles” (Gal. 3:8, 14; Jn. 3:14-15; 12:32).

Grace and Works are opposites (Rom. 4:14; 11:5, 6; Gal. 3:18; Jn. 1:16-17). If salvation is by works then the grace of God is nullified (see also Lesson 21). How serious the issue was.

LESSONS FOR US:

- Paul was quick to perceive the danger of false doctrine. He forthwith took drastic steps and brought the problem of Law and Grace to Jerusalem.
- There his conviction was confirmed by the united testimony of Apostle and Prophet. This gave him a document which he could thereafter use to “establish the ecclesias in the faith”. It was a defence against the pernicious Judaizers whose evil doctrine might have destroyed the Truth in its infancy

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

“The Apostle Paul” (W. H. Boulton)—Chapter 8

“Redemption in Christ Jesus” (W. F. Barling)—Appendix 1

“The Story of the Bible” (H. P. Mansfield)—Vol. 13, Pages 121-136

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *What evidence swayed the decision of the Jerusalem Conference?*
2. *How can man be justified before God?*
3. *Explain how Law and Grace are opposed.*
4. *What was the purpose of the Law of Moses?*

ESSAY QUESTION:

1. *Briefly outline the way in which Judaizers were undermining the Faith by their teachings in the first century ecclesias.*
2. *Briefly outline the issues that faced the Jerusalem Conference.*
3. *Outline James’ address and rulings concerning the issue that faced the Jerusalem Conference.*
4. *Explain the significance of each of the four “necessary things” which the Jerusalem Conference enjoined upon the Ecclesias at that time.*
5. *Tell the story of the Jerusalem Conference recorded in Acts 15.*



14. THE SECOND PREACHING CAMPAIGN: IMPRISONED AT PHILIPPI

“Come over into Macedonia, and help us”

After returning to Antioch with the decrees of the Jerusalem Conference, Paul’s mind returned to the Ecclesias established during his first campaign. He desired to revisit them and discussed the proposition with Barnabas. Barnabas wanted to take Mark, his relation (Col. 4:10), but Paul refused because he had lost confidence in him (Acts 15:38; 13:13). Neither party would yield and so they went different ways. Barnabas and Mark sailed to Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and “went through Syria and Cilicia”. Silas was a delegate from the Conference (15:22) and is called Silvanus in the Epistles (1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1; 1 Peter 5:12). He was a Jew who, like Paul, also had Roman citizenship (Acts 16:37-38).

From this beginning the gospel was, by God’s direction, to spread to new areas: the Spirit was to guide them into Greece and Achaia.

The aim of this lesson is to learn to be cheerful in tribulation for Christ’s sake.

Acts 15:36 - 16:40

CIRCUMCISION OF TIMOTHY: DECREES DELIVERED (Acts 16:1-5).

When Paul revisited the ecclesias at Lystra and Derbe he was impressed with a certain young man called Timothy. Timothy had previously witnessed the persecutions that came on Paul at Iconium and Lystra and had shown himself faithful (cp. Acts 14:19-20; 2 Tim. 3:11). “Him would Paul have to go forth with him”. It was known that because his father was a Greek he was uncircumcised. So Paul circumcised him. This may seem strange when it is remembered that Paul was carrying a decree not requiring it! But Paul was on a preaching campaign, a principle of which was, “to the Jew first” (Acts 13:46). In this way he would have access to the Jews: “unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews” (1 Cor. 9:19-23). Thus he overcame an obstacle which would have prevented him from preaching to Jews.

To the ecclesias Paul delivered the “decrees” (Gk. “dogmata”) of the Conference. This had the twofold effect of “establishing the ecclesias in the **faith**” and increasing their numbers (v.5). Sound doctrine brought both consolidation and growth.

THE MACEDONIAN CALL (Acts 16:6-11).

Three times the Spirit intervened to redirect Paul’s route:

1. **Verse 6**—They were forbidden to preach in Asia. Obviously Ephesus was not yet ready. “Asia” was a Roman province—a district of Asia Minor;

2. **Verse 7**—Not being permitted to go south they elected to go north to Bithynia, “but the Spirit suffered them not”.
3. **Verses 9-10**—Their dilemma was solved by a night vision in which a man from Macedonia appealed to Paul saying, “Come over into Macedonia, and help us”.

This was a clear enough instruction and so immediately the company sailed from Troas across the Aegean Sea to Neapolis. From thence they journeyed to Philippi on the Egnatian Way, the great road linking Asia and Europe.

The plea for help from Macedonia revealed how vain Greek learning was. The gospel and not Greek philosophy can answer and satisfy the great issues of life and bring joy, contentment and peace. Notice that the pronoun changes from “they” (v.8) to “we” (vv.10, 11, 15, 17), for Luke, the “beloved physician” and the author of Acts, joined the company at Troas (ancient Troy). It is probable that he remained at Philippi, as he says “they left” (v.40). He may have stayed there for about seven years (A.D. 53-60) as he rejoins Paul on his Third Journey: “we sailed away from Philippi” (20:5-6). If this was so, his presence would have contributed to the strength of the Ecclesia in that place as revealed in the epistle to the Philippians.

LYDIA: FIRSTFRUITS OF PHILIPPI (Acts 16:12-15).

Philippi was the “chief city of that part of Macedonia”. It was situated 16 kilometres from the coastal city, Neapolis, where Paul landed. It was named after Alexander the Great’s father, Philip of Macedon. In Paul’s day it was under Roman rule and raised to the status of “a colony”, i.e. its citizens had privileges such as ownership of land and slaves, and exemption from tribute. It was a miniature Rome, as it had the same laws and spirit. It seems that there was no synagogue there, for Paul, who usually went to the Jew first, went first to the river on the Sabbath. No Jews are mentioned in the rest of the narrative.

Among the women present was Lydia. Her native city was Thyatira and she acted as an agent for traders in “purple”, a valuable cloth dye. Though she “worshipped God”, her faith was defective. She, like Cornelius, had to hear “words whereby she might be saved” (cp. 10:2, 6; 11:14). Belief of the gospel and baptism were essential. So when she had firstly “attended to the things spoken”, she was baptised. We are told that the Lord opened her heart (v.14). In this we are taught the “doctrine of election”: “No man can come unto me except the Father which hath sent me draw him” (Jn. 6:44, 65; Rom. 9). The Spirit had directed Paul to Macedonia because of “hearts it had opened,” like Lydia’s (see v.14). She was a great woman who had a ready mind. As she had profited from their spiritual things, so she desired to show her appreciation in hospitality. Perhaps her influence contributed to the pleasantness so evident in that ecclesia “from the first day” (Phil. 1:5).

THE DAMSEL HEALED (Acts 16:16-18).

At Philippi there was a young woman “possessed with a spirit of divination” (lit. “of Python”, cp. v.16 mg). Python was supposed to be a huge legendary serpentine prophet which was slain by Apollo. Its spirit was still supposed to influence people. The damsel was really of unsound mind and was a kind of fortune-teller. But she was a slave both to her “masters” (Gk. kuriois, v. 16) and her disease. Now she followed Paul’s company and said they were “servants” (Gk. douloi, slaves) of the Most High God. Her acquaintance with them over “many days” made her realise that they could show the “way of salvation”. Paul was pained at the pathetic sight. It was not good, moreover, for the Truth to be associated with fortune-telling. So he set her free from the affliction and from her masters by the power of his Lord.

STRIPES AND IMPRISONMENT (Acts 16:19-24).

This action aroused her former masters to wrath. They had been deprived of their profits (cp. 19:25-26; Rev. 18:16-18). It mattered not that the young woman was now sane, for money meant more to them than salvation! They laid hold on Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place and laid against them the false charges of inciting rebellion and troublemaking. This was a convenient charge against strangers and was sure to succeed. They could hardly charge them with doing injury to their slave! With more emotion than reason the magistrates were swayed by the hostile mob and rent off the brethren’s clothes and commanded that they be beaten. After many stripes they were cast into prison and the jailor was given strict instructions to keep them safely. Accordingly they were “thrust into the inner prison and their feet made fast” (v.24).

EARTHQUAKE AND CONVERSION (Acts 16:25-34).

But Paul and Silas were not cast down. With great strength of mind they exemplified the exhortation of the Lord Jesus, “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. 12:12; Acts 5:41). In great faith they sang praises in the darkness of night. The prisoners heard them and so did God. Did not God promise that His angel would “encamp round about them that fear him, and deliver them”? (Ps. 34:7; cp. Psa. 107:10-16; 146:1-7). Their singing was interrupted by a mighty earthquake. The foundations shook, the doors swung open and the bands of all fell off. God was faithful and merciful.

The sound of the prisoners’ joy brought despair and near suicide to the jailor. His life depended on the life of the prisoners. Paul could see the motions of suicide in the shadows and cried out in assurance to the jailor: “Do thyself no harm: for we are all here”. These were strange prisoners indeed! He called for a light and sprang in but not in the manner appropriate to a security guard. He fell down trembling before them!

But he was not so concerned with securing them as being made free himself! "Sirs (Lords, Gk. kurioi, cp. v.16), what must I do to be saved?" (cp. Acts 2:37; Lk. 3:10). Fear led to desire, and desire, in turn, to belief. Belief brought obedience and baptism "that same hour of the night" to "all his house". Belief in the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, then baptism, are the essentials for salvation (cp. Mk. 16:15-16; Acts 2:38-39; 8:12).

But how was it that the jailor and his household knew sufficient to accept the responsibilities of the Truth so soon? It is obvious from his question in verse 30 that he was well acquainted with Paul's preaching. It was now well known and widespread for they had been there "many days" (cp. vv.17, 18, 20-21). The calm faithful demeanour of his prisoners and the singing of praises in jail after cruel stripes no doubt troubled him. Then came the earthquake which set them free. Were not these men indeed the "servants of the Most High God"? They had been honest too and had not made a break for freedom. These men were as different from the common run of mortals as was their message. He was convinced. That night, as the jailor and his household washed Paul and Silas' stripes, well could they say, "by their stripes we are healed" (Isa. 53:5).

DELIVERANCE AND DEPARTURE (Acts 16:35-40).

The next day the magistrates sent a message to the jailor to let Paul and Silas go free. They were afraid that the earthquake had taken place because of divine displeasure at the illegalities they had permitted the previous day. They had not even given them a trial! But Paul was not going to be so lightly set aside. Were they not Roman citizens? To them belonged a fair trial. Woe to those who denied Roman citizens this privilege—let alone allowed them to be beaten! When the news reached the magistrates that they were Romans, they had further cause for fear. They were frightened that they would be exposed. Paul's action had its desired effect. They came and besought them to leave the city. Their upstart pride was duly humbled.

Why did Paul do this? Was it an act of self-justification? Paul could see further than that. He was soon to leave Philippi and how would the small and inexperienced ecclesia fare in that bigoted city? Probably not well. Paul desired to teach these petty rulers a lesson. When he left, the magistrates would certainly hesitate to bring further persecution on them.

The lesson of Proverbs 18:13 applies to the magistrates—"He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him." There is a lesson here for us also—to be quick to hear but slow to speak and slow to wrath (Jas. 1:19).

After their deliverance from prison Paul and Silas went back to the house of Lydia, the tumult of their opponents having subsided. When they had comforted the concerned body of the faithful, they departed, Luke and Timothy apparently remaining to consolidate the ecclesia.

CHRIST AND PAUL.

When Paul later wrote to the Philippians he stressed that his desire was to be conformed to the sufferings, death and resurrection of Christ (Phil. 3:10-11; 1:29-30; 2:5). Thus he could say, “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1). The events at Philippi were a graphic portrayal of the last days of the Lord Jesus.

1. Though Paul obviously did a work of God (v.18), the “masters” of the damsel did not believe but moved against him because their vested interests were threatened (cp. Jn. 15:22).
2. Paul’s trial was a travesty of justice. They “hated him without a cause” (v.38; Ps. 35:19; Jn. 15:25). They made a false accusation by saying he was inciting rebellion against Rome (vv.20-21; cp. Jn. 19:12; Lk. 23:2). With Silas, he was “taken from prison and from judgment” (cp. Isa. 53:7-8).
3. They were beaten with “many stripes” (v.23; cp. Jn. 19:1; Isa. 53:5).
4. They were cast into prison—as good as dead, even as Christ was put to death and then placed in the tomb (v.24; cp. Jn. 19:41).
5. Divine displeasure was indicated by an earthquake which set them free (v.26; cp. Matt. 27:51; 28:2).
6. They were set free as if by resurrection from the bondage of mortality (v.26; cp. Matt. 28:7; Acts 2:24).
7. They became the saviour of life to those with whom they spoke (cp. 2 Cor. 2:16; 4:9-12).

Indeed, before their eyes Jesus Christ had been evidently set forth and crucified (Gal. 3:1; 1:16).

LESSONS FOR US:

- Paul desired to consolidate the work done on his first missionary campaign and strengthen the brethren.
- Having added Timothy and Luke to his company he was specifically guided by the Spirit into Macedonia, where he found honest and good hearts who believed and were baptised.
- The restoration of the damsel to sanity provoked the enmity of her masters, who, like many today, were more concerned with themselves and their money than spiritual values and the lives of others.
- God is faithful and delivered His servants by an earthquake. At all times His angels encamp around those who fear Him.
- The Philippian jailor is another example in Acts of the only steps to salvation—belief and baptism.
- The sufferings of Paul and Silas were similar to those of the Lord Jesus Christ. They teach the way to life.

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

“Letter to the Philippians” (T. J. Barling)

“Paul the Apostle” (W. H. Boulton)—Chapter 9

“The Story of the Bible” (H. P. Mansfield)—Vol. 13, Pages 136-155

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *Explain how Paul was guided to Philippi.*
2. *What do we know about the character of Lydia?*
3. *Why did Paul circumcise Timothy?*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *Give an account of Paul’s work in Philippi.*
2. *Describe the events leading up to Paul’s imprisonment in Philippi.*
3. *How were Paul’s sufferings at Philippi similar to those of Christ’s last days?*
4. *What lessons can we learn from the example of Paul and Silas at Philippi?*

15. PAUL IN ATHENS

“His spirit was stirred in him”

After their release from prison, Paul and Silas bade farewell to the Philippian ecclesia and passed on to Thessalonica. Here Paul's preaching was accepted by Jews and a great multitude of the Gentiles. But the unbelieving Jews incited the people against them. Although this was quelled by the rulers, the brethren sent them away to Berea where Paul and Silas found the Jews more noble than those at Thessalonica for they searched the scriptures daily to see whether the new teaching was scriptural. As a consequence many believed together with a good number of the Gentiles. But it was not long before the Jews of Thessalonica heard of Paul's success and, coming down to Berea, they stirred up the people. Again Paul's life was in danger and the brethren immediately sent him away by sea to Athens, while Silas and Timothy remained to strengthen the new ecclesia. On arrival at Athens, those who accompanied Paul returned to Berea with the commandment from Paul that Silas and Timothy should come to him speedily.

The aim of this lesson is to demonstrate that we should use every opportunity and circumstance to preach the Truth.

Acts 17

PAUL ALONE IN ATHENS.

Athens was an important centre of Greek learning, art and worship. It was named after the goddess Athena. The Acropolis dominates Athens; it is a steep hill on which stood the Parthenon, a huge marble temple 70 metres long dedicated to Athena. Athens was full of idols and temples and one ancient writer records that some of the streets of Athens were so crowded with those that sold idols that it was almost impossible to pass through them.

Paul was downcast and anxious that Silas and Timothy would come to him soon. He was appalled by the widespread idolatry—he saw temples and idols devoted to every form of worship. There was even an altar with the inscription “To the Unknown God”.

PAUL ANGERED BY THE IDOLATRY (Acts 17:16-17).

The sight of so many idols provoked Paul to preach. He therefore disputed with the Jews in the synagogue, while in the market place he preached daily to the Gentiles. The market place was an open square where people met to do business, discuss daily happenings or debate on philosophy and religion. The example of Paul in preaching alone in such a difficult environment should be noted by all. We, too, live in a society given over to “idolatry” and philosophy. This should not deter us from preaching, but like Paul we should be even more determined to confess the name of Jesus Christ and proclaim the coming Kingdom.

PAUL ENCOUNTERS THE PHILOSOPHERS (Acts 17:18-21).

Paul presented something new to the Athenians: the idea of a crucified man rising from the dead was surely different from anything they had heard.

Among those who heard Paul were certain philosophers known as the Epicureans and Stoicks. The Epicureans followed one, Epicureus, who held that pleasure was the highest good. They did not believe in life after death and so they reasoned that a wise man will enjoy the present. Their attitude was the same as many today, summed up in the words: "Let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die" (Isa. 22:13; 1 Cor. 15:32).

The Stoicks on the other hand held that virtue was the supreme good, and that man should be free of passion, joy, grief, pleasure or pain. Hence they practiced self-discipline and denial, but became proud of their accomplishments.

Believing in the immortality of the soul there was no place in their philosophies for a saviour or the resurrection. Thus conflict with Paul's teaching was inevitable. "What will this babbler say?", some mocked, whilst others declared, "He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods" (Gk. 'daimons', which in Greek mythology were supposed to be lesser deities who mediated between the supreme God and man). Thus Jesus, being set forth as the mediator between God and man, was associated with them. The word "babblers" literally means a "seed gatherer", but was applied to people who picked up and passed on scraps of knowledge without sense or aim.

In order to know exactly what Paul was setting forth they brought him "unto Areopagus" or Mars Hill, a short distance from the market place (vv.19-21).

The Areopagus was a bare rock some 120 metres high situated to the north of the market place. Steps led to seats hewn out of rock where judges sat in an open court. The legendary trial of Mars gave to the place its name.

THE GOSPEL CHALLENGES IDOLATRY (Acts 17:22-31).

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 goddess of wisdom. It was as though the city of idols was challenging Paul to state his case. Paul took up the challenge.

Paul began his speech by saying "Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious" (RSV). Paul appealed to the men of Athens in order to gain a hearing. Had he begun by attacking the national

gods in the midst of their sanctuaries he might have been in great danger.

Paul continued, “For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions (‘objects of your worship’ RSV), I found an altar with this inscription, ‘To the Unknown God’. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you” (v.23). The living God, the God of Israel, was clearly unknown to them, and so their self-confessed ignorance provided Paul with a pretext to speak to them about Him.

The speech of Paul can be summarised as follows:

Verse 24: Seeing that the “unknown God whom they ignorantly worshipped” made the world and was in fact the Creator of all things, He could not be confined to temples made by human hands. He was Lord of heaven and earth. He was thus greater than the numerous other gods they worshipped, whose shrines and temples could be seen about them (cp. the reasoning of Stephen, Acts 7:48-50). The Creator could not be confined to a mere temple of human construction (Isa. 66:1-2).

Verse 25: Furthermore, God was completely independent of His creatures in the sense that He needed nothing from them; rather they were dependent on Him seeing He gave them life. Men could not put God in debt with lavish gifts, as He sustained all living things and made and possessed the earth and its fulness (cp. Mic. 6:6-8; Psa. 50:8-14).

Verse 26: God had created Adam from whom all nations have come. He is in complete control of His creation and His purpose has proceeded according to His declared will. He has determined times and seasons for various events to take place, and the bounds of nations and empires He fixed and appointed (Dan. 2:21; 4:17; Jer. 27:5; Deut. 32:8).

Verses 27-28: God is not disinterested in His creation but would have all come to salvation. They could find Him if at least they would seek Him. He had confined knowledge of His purpose to Israel, for if He had not, judging from what had happened among the nations, the truth would have been lost completely. He could be found by all who sought Him. This must be so for He is near to all, for all live, move and exist in Him. This had even been acknowledged by one of their poets (Epimenides) who had spoken of man as the offspring of God—he had perceived the error of some of their beliefs and taught a view corresponding with the particular truth Paul is setting out.

Verse 29: Seeing men are God’s offspring and are living and intelligent, they ought not to look upon God as something inanimate like silver and gold! (Psa. 115:4-8). This was plainly not logical. God and man, as Creator and created, were both alive and able to reason.

Verse 30: If the times of ignorance had been overlooked by God, the coming of knowledge brought them into a position of responsibility. The light of divine truth no longer was the prerogative of Israel alone; God was now taking out of all nations a people for His name and Paul had been specifically commissioned to relate the gospel of God’s salvation in Christ to them (Acts 15:14; 9:15).

Verse 31: Mention of their responsibility implied judgment, and God had raised Jesus Christ from the dead as death's conqueror who will come to "judge the world in righteousness" — a citation from Psa. 96:13. (Notice how the train of thought in Psalm 96 presents a remarkable parallel with Paul's speech on Mars Hill; both culminate in the same statement). Thus God, the Creator (v. 24), has a purpose which is proceeding according to His appointed times; He must complete His schedule and that requires a day of judgment. The certainty of this is guaranteed by the established fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

INTERRUPTION AND DEPARTURE (Acts 17:32-34).

The apostle was heard with attention until he spoke about the resurrection. No doubt Paul would have continued and elaborated the way of salvation in Christ, but he was prevented because the idea of resurrection brought forth mockery from some. Others said with courteous indifference, "We will hear thee again of this matter". Paul considered there was no point in remaining longer and so he departed.

The apostle's speech had not entirely fallen on deaf ears. We read that certain of the philosophers were keen to hear more of the new religion and ultimately they believed. Among the believers was Dionysius, the Areopagite, who, as his title suggested, could have been one of the judges of the court of Areopagus and thus perhaps one of the leading men of the city. There was also a woman named Damaris and, although nothing further is known of this woman, she too must have been prominent in Athens for her name to be singled out by Luke the historian. And then there were others who are not named.

Thus the apostle found that although the results of his preaching were not as spectacular as elsewhere, for the university environment was not a fruitful one for the Truth, yet nevertheless through Yahweh's grace the nucleus of an ecclesia was established.

Athens was renowned for worldly wisdom, but the gospel did not find a lodging place in the hearts of many of its citizens. Generally it is the poor in this world who are rich in faith and are called by the Father (cp. 1 Cor. 1:18-31; 3:19-20; Jas. 2:5).

LESSONS FOR US:

- Paul was quick to seize upon all opportunities to preach the gospel.
- Faithful preaching brings forth opposition, before which we should faithfully persevere.
- A good knowledge is necessary to effectively set forth the purpose of God, answer the objections of men and expose the folly of their beliefs.
- Though results of preaching might not be spectacular, we should not be discouraged. The Truth rarely lodges in minds swelled by the wisdom of the world.

- The fact of Christ's coming as judge is proved by his resurrection from the dead.

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

- "Paul the Apostle" (W. H. Boulton)—Chapter 11
"Story of the Bible" (H. P. Mansfield)—Vol. 13, Pages 162-168
"The Christadelphian" (J. Carter)—Vol. 94 (1957), Pages 9-13

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *Describe the kind of people who made up Paul's audience on Mars Hill.*
2. *What lessons do we learn from Paul's attitude and example in Athens?*
3. *In what way does the world of today compare with Athens of Paul's day?*
4. *List the challenges Paul faced when he went to Athens.*
5. *What was the reaction to Paul's speech on Mars Hill and what lessons does this have for us?*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *Relate briefly the events that took place when the apostle Paul went to Athens.*
2. *Outline the argument in Paul's speech on Mars Hill and its effect on the people.*
3. *How did Paul respond to the challenges he confronted when he came to Athens?*



16. THE THIRD PREACHING CAMPAIGN: PAUL AT EPHESUS

“I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God”

Paul left Athens and travelled to Corinth, where for eighteen months he preached with good results, despite opposition from the Jews. Eventually he returned by ship to Jerusalem to keep a Jewish feast. On the return journey, Paul visited Ephesus where he went to the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. He found the response favourable, and when the Jews desired him to stay he replied, “I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, if God will” (Acts 18:21). After landing at Caesarea, he went up to the ecclesia at Jerusalem and gave a report of his preaching. Then he returned to Antioch from where he had set out on his second missionary journey some three years before (Acts 15:40).

The aim of this lesson is two-fold:—

- 1. To show how a faithful stand triumphs over obstacles.*
- 2. To see how Paul conducted his personal life to assist with the gospel’s promotion.*

Acts 19 and 20

RETURN TO EPHESUS.

After spending some time at Antioch, Paul decided to undertake a third journey to revisit areas in which he had previously laboured. Leaving Antioch, he went over the country of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening the disciples, and then eventually came to Ephesus (Acts 19:1).

Ephesus was the greatest city of Asia Minor, being the capital city of the Roman province of Asia. It was renowned for the worship of Diana and the practice of magic. The Temple of Diana was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It was reported to be 130 metres long and 70 metres wide, with 127 columns 18 metres high gracing its front, sides and back. Probably no building in the ancient world was so admired.

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.

PAUL PREACHES THE TRUTH IN EPHESUS (Acts 19:1-9).

The apostle met certain disciples who had been baptised by John the Baptist, with the baptism of repentance. John had told his disciples that they should believe on “him which should come after him”, that is Jesus Christ (v.4). When it was explained that Christ had come and that salvation was offered by baptism into him they were baptised in the name of Christ, and received the gift of the Holy Spirit by the laying on of Paul’s

hands. Paul then returned to the synagogue at Ephesus as he had promised (18:21). For three months he boldly preached and persuaded a number of the synagogue "the things concerning the Kingdom of God". Inevitably this aroused opposition; some were bitterly opposed and Paul found it necessary to separate from them. An ecclesia at Ephesus was thus formed and they met in the schoolroom of one, Tyrannus.

THE TRUTH RADIATES FROM EPHEBUS (Acts 19:10).

For two years the ecclesia used the schoolroom and from this centre Paul proclaimed and established the Truth in Ephesus; he also taught from house to house (20:20). Seeing Ephesus was the capital and the centre of commerce and worship, Paul had ready access to a large number of people. Besides his own witness, those whom he converted became in turn witnesses, and so the gospel spread into regions which Paul did not visit in person. Thus Luke could say, "all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks" (19:10).

SPECIAL MIRACLES PERFORMED BY PAUL (Acts 19:11-13).

As God had endorsed Peter's preaching with special miracles (5:15), so He did with Paul. Handkerchiefs (sweat cloths) and aprons were taken from Paul's body to those who were ill and they recovered. The amazing cures effected through Paul refuted the charms and other incantations used by false healers. There were then in the city certain Jewish exorcists who wandered from place to place (vagabonds) preying on the superstition of the people. These men apparently concluded that the name of Jesus acted as a charm and attempted Paul's method of healing; "We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth" was the magical formula they used (19:13). One specific incident recorded by Luke, brought shame on the exorcists and became a triumph for the Truth.

THE GOSPEL TRIUMPHS OVER SUPERSTITION (Acts 19:14-20).

Among the exorcists were seven brothers, sons of Sceva. They used the name of Jesus in an endeavour to cure a maniac, but to their amazement the man answered, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are ye?" (v.15). In a fit of rage he leaped on the brothers and with violence tore off their clothes and beat them, and they fled from the house naked and wounded.

The incident became known to all and the gospel gained new respect. Paul's preaching was vindicated, his authority acknowledged and "the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified" (v.17). A certain fear fell upon believers and they willingly renounced any attachments they may still have had with magic and superstition. And even among unbelievers there was a profound effect; those who practised "curious arts" openly renounced their practice and brought their books of magic and burnt them publicly. Book after book was thrown on to the bonfire, their value being assessed to be 50,000 pieces of silver (over \$50,000 today).

This scene must have been long remembered in Ephesus. It was a striking victory over the powers of darkness: “So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed” (v.20).

OPPOSITION FROM THE SILVERSMITHS (Acts 19:21-27).

Seeing the gospel seed had taken root in Ephesus, Paul planned to pass through Macedonia and Achaia, en route to Jerusalem and Rome. So he sent Timothy and Erastus into Macedonia to prepare the way, while he remained in Ephesus. Paul’s intention was to stay there until Pentecost (1 Cor. 16:8), which would include the month of May. May was called the “Artemisian” by the Ephesians, for during this month the city celebrated national games and worshipped the goddess Artemis, or Diana. Silversmiths who made the portable images of Diana expected brisk trade, but this year was different. Paul’s miracles, the public burning of the books of magic, and the extensive preaching of the gospel, directly challenged the worship of the goddess. Profit from the sale of the images slumped, and “there arose no small stir about that way” (v.23). One of the silversmiths, Demetrius, organised a meeting of all those affected. His speech to the gathering clearly reveals the effect of Paul’s preaching.

“Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth. Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands: So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth” (vv.25-27).

A RIOT IN EPHEBUS (Acts 19:28-34).

The true motive of Demetrius was greed and covetousness, but this had been thinly sanctified by a professed reverence for Diana. His words had the effect desired; the infuriated workmen clamoured for the honour of their goddess—“Great is Diana of the Ephesians”.

Their chanting was heard by others and soon a great crowd gathered. The whole city was thrown into confusion, and they “rushed with one accord into the theatre”. They laid hands on two of Paul’s travelling companions, Gaius and Aristarchus. Their lives were in danger, and Paul purposed to intervene. But the disciples and certain rulers called Asiarchs, Paul’s friends, seeing the danger, restrained him.

Meanwhile the angry mob crowded into the theatre rending the air with their confused hysterical cries but “the more part knew not wherefore they were come together” (v.32). The Jews of the city were concerned that they would be implicated, and anxious to clear themselves, they put forward one Alexander. Hearing that he was a Jew and knowing their opposition to idolatry, the crowd was whipped up to a new height of frenzy, and cried for two hours, “Great is Diana of the Ephesians” (v.34)!

THE TOWN CLERK APPEASES THE PEOPLE (Acts 19:35-41).

At length the Town Clerk, a man of skill and tact, was able to quieten the crowd. He reminded them that everyone knew that the city of Ephesus was the temple guardian of the great Diana, and of her image which fell from heaven. The contradiction of a few strangers could not affect "the facts", and therefore they should not have acted rashly. He said that Paul and his companions had not been guilty of profaning the Temple or of blaspheming Diana, but if any had a charge to lodge, then the courts were there to hear it. Finally he reminded them that they had acted unlawfully and might themselves face charges from their Roman overlords. His words had the desired effect: quietly they disbanded and went their ways.

PAUL LEAVES EPHEBUS (Acts 20:1-15).

The riot at Ephesus signalled the end of Paul's work in the city. He had been with the ecclesia for three years and during that time the Truth had made great progress, not only in Ephesus but in all Asia. But there was work to be done elsewhere, and so, calling the ecclesia together, in an affectionate meeting he bade them farewell and departed for Macedonia. There he strengthened the brethren and then moved on to Achaia, where he abode for three months. Paul intended to sail direct from Achaia to Syria, but learnt of a plot amongst the Jews to take him, so he retraced his steps through Macedonia and sailed from Philippi. After stopping at Troas and meeting the disciples, he continued on foot to Assos where he boarded the ship.

PAUL'S CHARGE TO THE ELDERS OF EPHEBUS (Acts 20:16-38).

Paul no doubt would have desired to visit the ecclesia at Ephesus, but as he was anxious to be back in Jerusalem for Pentecost, this was not possible (v.16). However, when the boat arrived at Miletus, he sent a messenger to Ephesus to call the elders to him that he might give them some parting words of exhortation.

On their arrival he reviewed his labours at Ephesus. He pointed to his example of dedication and self-sacrifice. He had taught "publicly and from house to house". He told them of the responsibilities that rested on their shoulders, for they would see his face no more (as he thought). He warned the elders that "of their own selves shall men arise. . .to draw away disciples after them" (v.30), and therefore they must watch over the flock. In a final moving appeal he said, "Ye yourselves know that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me" (v.34). What a wonderful example of dedication he had set.

Commending the brethren to the grace of God, Paul kneeled down and prayed with them all. The elders who had benefited so much from the apostle's ministrations "wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him"; they sorrowed most at his statement "that they should see his face no more" (vv.37-38).

Solemnly they accompanied him to the ship and bade farewell to the brother they loved so much.

LESSONS FOR US:

- After spending but two years in Ephesus, Paul's efforts brought the Truth before the notice of all in Asia. The power of the Truth over the superstition of men was evident to all.
- So great was the effect of Paul's preaching that the local silversmiths felt the loss in trade. Their world was no different from ours where men's lust for wealth over-rides what is good and true.
- Paul's love for the brethren was such that he called for the elders of the Ephesian ecclesia, so that he could give them final words of exhortation.
- Paul's zeal, his witness before all men, his unselfishness in providing for himself and others, gives us an example to follow.

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

"Paul the Apostle" (W. H. Boulton)—Chapter 14
"Story of the Bible" (H. P. Mansfield)—Vol. 13, Pages 187-190;
Vol. 14, Pages 5-28

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *Briefly outline the way in which the ecclesia at Ephesus came into being.*
2. *Describe the effect of Paul's preaching from the schoolroom of Tyrannus.*
3. *How did the Gospel triumph over superstition in Ephesus?*
4. *What lessons can we take from Paul's work at Ephesus?*
5. *What did Paul say to the elders of the Ephesian Ecclesia, when he met them at Miletus?*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *Describe the ways in which the Truth became established in Ephesus.*
2. *What events led up to the riot in Ephesus, and what was the outcome?*
3. *From Paul's example at Ephesus, show how he disciplined his life so that the gospel could be spread effectively.*

17. JERUSALEM AND BONDS

“He steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem”

Paul’s missionary journeys were behind him with all the tribulations which attended them. He had preached the Gospel. Ecclesias had been established and strengthened throughout the civilised world. The attitude of the elders of the ecclesia at Ephesus would reflect the sentiments of the true brethren in all parts as they sorrowed “that they should see his face no more” (Acts 20:38). Like Jesus, Paul now “steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem” (Lk. 9:51). He would readily give himself for the gospel’s sake (Phil. 1:20; 2:17; 3:8; Col. 1:24). He had a contest to complete (2 Tim. 4:7; Phil. 2:16), and the service Christ had laid down for him, he would fulfil (Acts 9:15, 16).

The aim of this lesson is to show how bold and fearless Paul was as a witness for Christ.

Acts 21, 22, 23

PAUL HEADS FOR JERUSALEM (Acts 21:1-14).

Leaving Miletus, Paul’s journey by ship took him to Coos, then Rhodes, then east along the south coast of Lycia to Patara where they were fortunate to find a ship that would sail direct to Phoenicia. At Tyre, Paul stayed with local brethren. During this sojourn, some of the members, through the power of the Holy Spirit, predicted that bonds and afflictions awaited him at Jerusalem (21:4). Seven days later Paul departed by ship for Acre (Ptolemais).

From Acre, Paul travelled south to Caesarea, staying at the house of Philip. Again trouble was forecast for Paul, this time through the prophet Agabus. Paul, the prophet said, would be bound by the Jews and delivered to the Gentiles (21:11). With Jerusalem near at hand, even Paul’s travelling companions, who had so continuously heard the same prediction, now joined their pleading with that of the local brethren in beseeching the Apostle not to go up to Jerusalem. Paul’s reply caused the brethren to stop, observe and ponder: “What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus” (v.13). The great principle of Paul’s life and the secret of his courage and determination was a confident faith in God’s power and His promise of support (Phil. 4:13; 2 Cor. 12:9, 10). Paul’s faith overcame the world (1 Jn. 5:4, 5). Reverently the brethren responded: “The will of the Lord be done” (Acts 21:14).

JERUSALEM — AT LAST (Acts 21:15-26).

Three days and some 120 kilometres later, Paul and his companions received a friendly welcome from the Jerusalem brethren. On the day following, they met with James and all the elders of the large ecclesia (v.18; cp. v.20). Paul gave a detailed account of his activities

especially making mention of “what things God had wrought among the Gentiles” by his ministry. The plain implication in his words was that if God had accepted Gentiles who did not observe the Law, then any seeking to impose it or enforce it on Jew or Gentile did wrong in God’s eyes.

James and the elders glorified God for His grace extended to the Gentiles as well as the Jews, but they warned of dangers facing Paul. There were widespread rumours alleging that he:—

1. refused to impose the requirements of the Law of Moses on Gentile believers;
2. actively dissuaded Jewish believers against continuing to keep the Law.

Whereas Paul vigorously opposed the teaching of Judaism, he did not oppose the proper use of the Law (cp. Rom. 7:12; 1 Tim. 1:8; Gal. 3:24; 1 Cor. 9:20). Paul assented to the spirit of the Law, of which Law, Christ is the substance. Hence Paul had no hesitation in accepting the suggestion of the elders to publicly endorse the action of four Jewish believers who had taken upon themselves the Nazarite vow (see Num. 6). The vow taught that “by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified” (Rom. 3:20); that even the greatest and most righteous men under the Law still sinned and came short of the glory of God. Therefore they too, were in need of redemption, which fact was acknowledged in that they had to offer the sin offering as well as others! (Lev. 16:17). Accordingly, after preparations were finished, Paul made his way with the four men into the Temple.

A RIOTOUS TEMPLE CROWD (Acts 21:27-40; 22:1-30).

The seven days were almost ended when Paul was recognised in the Temple by some Jews visiting Jerusalem from Asia. Paul was hated by them, for they accused him of “teaching all men everywhere against the people (Jews), and the Law, and this place (Herold’s Temple)” (v.28). They also accused him of profaning the Temple by bringing Greeks into it.

The whole city was incited against Paul and he was dragged from the Temple and beaten almost to the point of death. Fortunately someone had taken the news of the uproar to the Roman Captain, Claudius Lysias. When the Jews saw the Roman soldiers they ceased beating Paul. As the soldiers led him away in chains, the people crowded around shouting, “Away with him” (v.36), as they had some years before (cp. Lk. 23:18). To enter the fortress they had to climb stairs. When they were on the way up Paul spoke in Greek to the captain, asking if he could speak to the people.

Allowed to speak, Paul, with his characteristic hand gesture, addressed the crowd in the Hebrew tongue. He spoke of his heritage and upbringing and how, as a disciple of Gamaliel in this very Temple, he had been educated to be strictly orthodox. Though born in Tarsus in Cilicia his zeal was such that he had come to Jerusalem to be more perfectly instructed. With zeal for God, he had persecuted the followers of Jesus Christ even to death.

In some detail he narrated the events that had taken place on the way to Damascus; of the voice from heaven, of the blindness that had ensued, of his being led into Damascus, and of the visit of Ananias. The crowd listened in silence. He went on to describe the miracle of his blindness being healed, his baptism and his total change of life. He made particular mention of further revelations in Jerusalem (22:17). These facts also had no adverse effect upon Paul's audience. However, as soon as he stated his commission from the Lord Jesus, "I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles" (v.21), all the pent-up hatred of the Jews towards their conquerors, towards the Greeks, and toward this apparently renegade Jew, burst forth. Casting off their clothes and casting dust into the air, they cried, "Away with such a fellow from the earth; for it is not fit that he should live!" (vv. 22-23).

Not understanding the sudden outburst of rage, the captain took Paul into the castle, with the intention of extracting the truth by torture, a common Roman practice with criminals. But by asserting that he was a Roman citizen, a status into which he had been born (unlike the captain who had purchased it), Paul brought their intentions to a halt. The first move was thus taken in a chain of events that eventuated in Paul being sent to Rome.

Seeking a definite charge against Paul, the Sanhedrin was assembled to make a formal enquiry.

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

Before the Sanhedrin, Paul boldly took the initiative. All his life, he said, he had been conscious of God's laws and had striven to uphold them. Incensed at this statement, the High Priest, who was supposed to uphold the Law, ordered Paul to be smitten contrary to the Law (Deut. 25:1-2). Paul quickly responded by prophesying "God shall smite thee, thou whited wall" (v.3). Josephus records that Ananias, High Priest from A.D. 47-59, was later murdered, thus fulfilling Paul's prediction.

Part of the Sanhedrin was made up of Pharisees who believed in the resurrection and angels, and part was of Sadducees who denied both. Paul continued and cleverly divided his accusers by appealing to the Pharisees in the words, "I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question" (v.6). Conflict between the Sadducees and the Pharisees occurred at once. Paul, again in danger, was snatched out of their midst by the guard and brought into the castle.

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

During the night Paul was again encouraged by the Lord standing by him (v.11; cp. 18:9; 22:17). He was comforted by the assurance that as he had borne witness at Jerusalem, so he must yet testify to Christ in Rome (v.11). The hatred of the Jews and their complete lack of respect for the Law was indicated by the vow of the would-be murderers of Paul (v.12), which was sanctioned by the chief priests (v.14). On hearing of

this plot, Claudius Lysias sent Paul with an escort of 470 soldiers under cover of night to Caesarea (vv.23-24), the headquarters of the Roman power in the land. A message was sent to Felix, the governor, outlining the details of the case. It summarised the events of the Temple riot and the conspiracy against Paul, but carefully omitted to mention that Paul's citizenship was revealed under threat of scourging! At Caesarea Paul was kept in custody pending the arrival of his accusers from Jerusalem. These circumstantial details illustrate the way in which God uses the schemes of men to fulfil His will; Paul was to preach in Rome and this was the beginning of his long journey there. There was nothing that men could do to upset the purpose of God.

LESSONS FOR US:

- God protects His servants and gives them strength in their trials.
- We should be faithful servants of Christ ready to accept his way, not afraid to speak the Truth, and confident that our God will uphold us.
- The Hand of God controls the lives of men, bringing His purpose to its fulfilment.
- Our service to Christ should be bold and unflinching so that God's name might be glorified.

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

“Paul the Apostle” (W. H. Boulton)—Chapters 17, 18
“The Story of the Bible” (H. P. Mansfield)—Vol. 14, Pages 60-81
“Archaeology and the New Testament” (Merrill F. Unger)—Chap. 16

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *Why did Paul keep a vow of the Mosaic Law when he came to Jerusalem?*
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?*
5. *What lessons can we learn from Paul's bold and fearless defence of the gospel in Jerusalem?*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *Discuss the important aspects of Paul's speech to the Jews in the Temple court after he had been arrested by Claudius Lysias on his last visit to Jerusalem.*
2. *Outline the events surrounding the riot in the Temple, and the plot against Paul's life by the Jews, when he was in Jerusalem for the last time.*
3. *What part did the Law of Moses play in the life of Paul? Comment on the reason for Paul's vow and purification at the Temple on his last visit to Jerusalem.*

18. PAUL'S DEFENCE BEFORE RULERS

“Thou art a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings”

When Claudius Lysias, the chief captain of the Temple guard in Jerusalem, heard of the Jewish plot to destroy Paul, he sent a large company of soldiers to escort Paul to Caesarea (the Roman headquarters in Palestine at that time). A message was also sent to Felix, the governor, giving him an account of Paul's arrest and advising him that Paul's accusers had been instructed to present their charges before Felix.

The aim of this lesson is to show how Paul defended himself and proclaimed the Gospel to rulers and authorities (Acts 9:15-16).

Acts 24, 25, 26

THE HEARING BEFORE FELIX (Acts 24).

The High Priest Ananias, members of the Sanhedrin, and Tertullus, a lawyer, presented their case. Three charges were laid against Paul by Tertullus who was a skillful orator:

1. Exciting factions among the Jews (charge of sedition).
2. Being a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes (charge of heresy).
3. Being a profaner of the Temple (charge of sacrilege).

Although Rome was tolerant in matters of religion, it was opposed to agitators, whether political or religious. It was therefore on this latter ground that Tertullus based his charges.

Systematically Paul answered the charges laid against him. He argued that:—

1. It was only 12 days since he had arrived in Jerusalem (v.11) and hence he did not have time to bring about the disturbance. He had neither disputed publicly, nor had provoked any riotous assembly (vv.12-13).
2. Though the Jews regarded Paul's teaching as heresy, in fact it was in accordance with their scriptures. His worship and teachings were based upon the Law and the prophets of Israel; a fundamental doctrine being the hope of the resurrection of the dead, which the Jews themselves admit (vv.14-16).
3. He had come to Jerusalem to bring alms collected among the ecclesias, for his fellow-Jewish christians. In the temple he had been “found purified”; he was not profaning it (vv.17-18)!

Paul not only rebutted the charges against him, but pointed out that legally there was no case to answer, for the so-called eyewitnesses were absent (v.19). In addition, the fundamental belief of the resurrection of the dead was no crime at all.

Felix summed up, drawing on his knowledge of “the way” of the truth (v. 22). The hearing was adjourned, and Paul was detained in custody.

In the days that followed, at Felix's request Paul expounded the faith in Christ to the hardened procurator, and Drusilla, his young Jewish (third) wife. He pointedly directed their attention to the requirements of righteousness, the necessity for self-control and the inevitability of judgment. They became afraid and terminated the interview. With mixed motives Felix frequently conversed with Paul in the following months. Two tedious years later, the procuratorship of Felix ended and, seeking to please the Jews, he left Paul bound. The new Procurator was Porcius Festus.

THE HEARING BEFORE FESTUS (Acts 25:1-12).

Three days after his arrival in Caesarea, Festus went to Jerusalem to meet the Sanhedrin and the Jewish rulers. Their implacable hatred of Paul had not diminished. They requested to have Paul sent to Jerusalem, thus providing them with opportunity to assassinate him. Festus saw through their cunning and requested an official deputation from them to come to Caesarea. The whole case was to be reopened.

On the day after Festus returned to Caesarea, Paul was arraigned before the Roman judgment seat. Jews from Jerusalem stood by and laid many grievous charges against Paul. Festus saw that the Jews "could not prove" them. Obviously, Paul should have been set at liberty; but if Festus did that he faced a crisis with the Jews. When Festus proposed that the tribunal be transferred to Jerusalem, Paul, in fear of his life, had no choice but to "appeal to Caesar". Festus and the Jews were taken by surprise, but now it meant the end of the touchy and difficult case, as far as the Governor was concerned.

THE HEARING BEFORE AGRIPPA (Acts 25:13-27; 26:1-29).

When King Agrippa II, the son of Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12), visited Caesarea, Festus took the opportunity to discuss Paul's case with him. Agrippa wished to hear Paul personally. It was not to be a legal hearing as the case was reserved to be heard in Rome.

With great pomp the young 30 year old King Agrippa II and his sister Bernice, with Festus, his military tribunes, and leading citizens of Caesarea assembled in the judgment hall. At Festus' command, Paul was led in wearing chains. This man, almost twice their age, stood before them. He had undertaken three great preaching campaigns totalling thousands of kilometres during 10 years (see 2 Cor. 11:25-28; 6:4-10; Rom. 15:15-19). Christ had strengthened him by vision, power and protection (Phil. 4:13). With indomitable courage and tears he had surmounted tremendous obstacles—personal, ecclesial, municipal and national. Two years before he had silenced a riotous crowd (Acts 21:40). Now he was to deliver an appealing and impelling vindication of his life in the service of Jesus Christ.

In the opening verses of his defence Paul described his upbringing.

Even his accusers, if they would testify, could give evidence concerning his former life. The hope he embraced was the hope of the promise made to the fathers of Israel, a hope embraced by all 12 tribes of Israel, and because of his faithful adherence to it, he should not be accused of heresy by the Jews (26:4-7). Suddenly he brought the matter to a focus, "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?" (v.8). Yes, why? The Jewish Scriptures, which Agrippa knew, contained accounts of the dead being brought to life again, and the Pharisees ardently believed that God would raise the dead.

Paul resumed the summary of his life. He told of his violent opposition to the followers of Jesus and how he had led the campaign to crush the Christians. On the road to Damascus the event took place that changed his life. Christ appeared to him in glory and he was struck to the ground and blinded. His conscience was convicted that the Christian cause was God's cause. He was an eyewitness of the resurrection of Christ which confirmed the claim that Jesus was the Messiah of Israel. He came to see that his crucifixion was a sacrifice for the sins of his people and the fulfilment of the types and shadows of the Law. Paul was charged by Christ to carry the gospel to the nations as "a minister and a witness" (v.16). "Wherefore", he continued, "O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision" (v.19). Paul taught that the Gentiles equally and rightfully shared the inheritance formerly reserved for Israel (v.20; Gal. 3:8, 14-16, 27-29). This was the cause of Jewish bitterness and attempted assassinations of him (Acts 21:27, 28, 31).

Again Paul emphasised that his teaching was based exclusively on the writings of Moses and Jewish prophets, which taught explicitly what he preached (v.22), namely:—

1. The Christ (Messiah) had to suffer;
2. The Christ had to be resurrected;
3. The Christ had to proclaim light (salvation) to Israel;
4. Through the Christ salvation would come to the Gentiles (v.23; Isa. 49:6).

Festus was led to protest that much study had affected Paul's ability to reason (v. 24). Paul rebuffed the suggestion that he was mad and insisted that what he had said were words of soberness and truth. The climax of Paul's exposition was that Jesus was the Christ because he had been raised from the dead and that he was a "light of the Gentiles". The evidence was irrefutable, and Paul pressed the point. "King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets?" (v.27). Agrippa attempted to avoid the question with a kind of jest: "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian" (v.28). With gravity and seriousness Paul fixed his eyes upon the King and said, "I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds" (v.29).

THE DECISION (Acts 26:30-32).

The meeting was over, but little came of it. It was obvious to all present that the Jews had no case against the prisoner. Paul's appeal to Rome

had settled the matter. Paul, who stood alone before Felix, Festus and Agrippa, was to stand before Nero.

LESSONS FOR US:

- God's servants should never be afraid to speak freely about their beliefs.
- We may have to preach the Gospel through trial and tribulation.
- "If any man speak let him speak as the oracles of God" (1 Pet. 4:11).
- Our desire should be that **all** with whom we come in contact might hear and accept the word of salvation.
- Irrespective of the circumstances of life in which we find ourselves, God must always come first.

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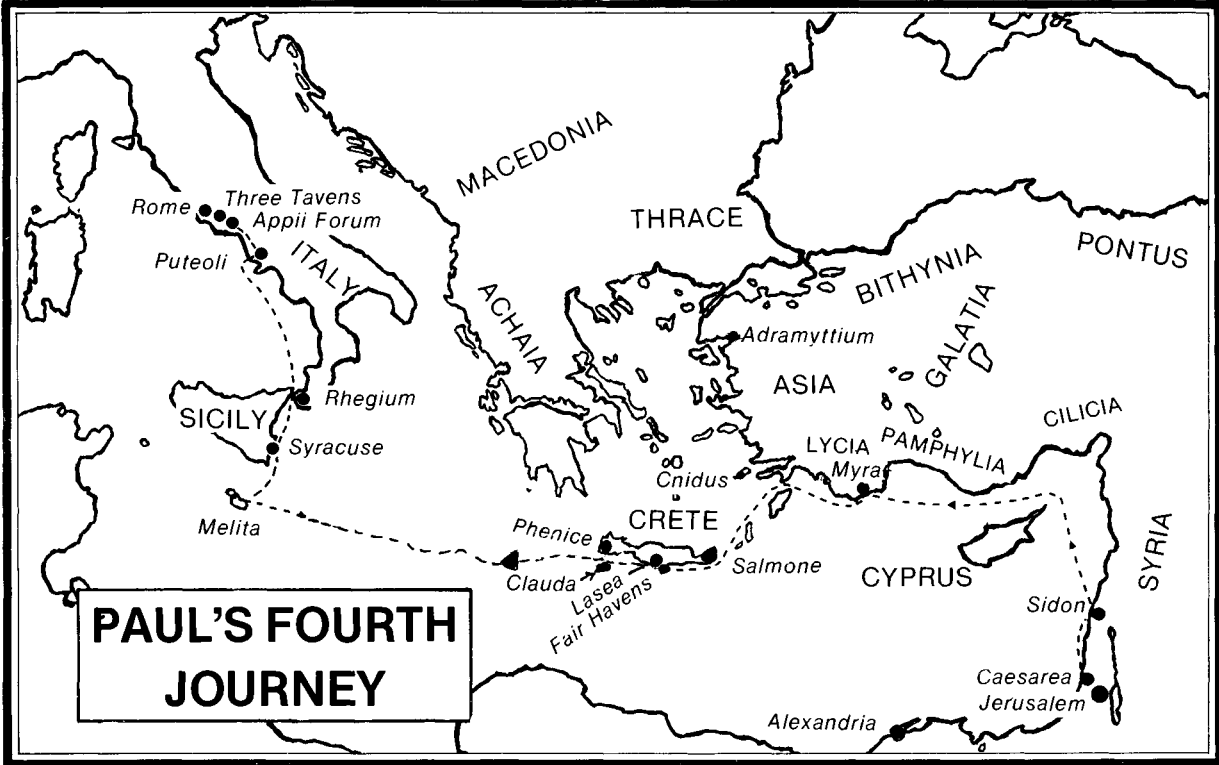
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Chapter 17, Pages 297, 304

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *What did Paul say to King Agrippa about the hope of the promises and the resurrection of the dead?*
2. *What commission was given to Paul, after he had been converted by Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus?*
3. *What did Paul declare that Moses and the prophets had foretold concerning Christ when he stood before Agrippa?*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *What charges did the Jews make against Paul when he stood before Felix? How did Paul answer them?*
2. *Outline the major events that led to Paul being taken from Jerusalem to Rome.*
3. *What personal exhortations can we learn from Paul during his period of imprisonment in Caesarea?*
4. *When he was converted, Paul was told he was a chosen vessel to bear Christ's name before kings and the children of Israel (Acts 9:15). How was this mission fulfilled in his defence before Felix, Festus and Agrippa?*



**PAUL'S FOURTH
JOURNEY**

19. PAUL GOES TO ROME

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

The account of the voyage to Rome from Caesarea is given in detail. It records Paul's calmness, confidence and patience of faith in the face of uncontrollable adverse forces, panic and despair. It is the Paul of the Epistles who is revealed on this voyage, providing an example, in a real life situation, of the attitude he commends in his letters.

The aim of this lesson is to show how Paul's faith triumphed over “perils in the sea” (2 Cor. 11:26), and how he gave hope to all aboard the ship.

Acts 27, 28

PAUL SAILS FOR ROME (Acts 27:1-26).

From the time Paul came to Philippi at the end of his third preaching campaign, Luke was his constant companion. He remained with Paul during his journey to Jerusalem (Acts 20:6; 21:18), and with Aristarchus accompanied Paul on his way to Rome (27:1-2).

Paul had prayed for the brethren at Rome continuously. Above all, he wanted them established in the faith. When writing to the brethren at Rome, he said he was prepared to go there “by any means” (Rom. 1:10). Now years later it was to transpire, with Paul taken there as a prisoner under the custody of a Roman Centurion named Julius.

Stopping at Sidon a day after setting sail, Paul was permitted to land and be refreshed by brethren. The ship then headed westward. With the wind contrary, that is, from the west, the “ship of Adramyttium” sailed east of Cyprus, where the mountains of that island reduced the force of the blast, and on across to Myra. It was here that the party left this ship and joined a larger vessel, a “corn ship”, one of the imperial fleet which sailed between Alexandria (the main Egyptian port) and Italy. This magnificent ship carrying its cargo of grain, so vital to the people and the Emperor, was never to arrive. But it did carry the Apostle Paul, with the true bread of life, a further step towards Rome.

Still the west wind blew strongly, and the grain ship with 276 aboard put to sea in the face of the wind (v.7), beating along the coast of Asia as far as Cnidus. They crossed to Crete and coasted along its southern side to a port named Fair Havens and dropped anchor. It was now late September. Winter was approaching rapidly. Paul's advice was that the ship see out the winter at this port. He prophesied disaster if the ship should sail. The pilot and captain gave contrary opinions, in that Phenice, only about 70 kilometres distant, offered better harbour facilities. When the strong westerlies died down and a gentle southerly breeze sprung up, they weighed anchor. Emerging from the shelter of Fair Havens, they were suddenly hit by a typhoon. Frantically the crew lifted the lifeboat on board, and undergirded the ship with thick cables,

as the vessel was buffeted towards the deadly quicksands of northern Africa. Cargo was jettisoned to lighten the leaking ship. Day after day, huge waves and strong currents battered the ship. Ill and not eating, the crew and passengers waited for the vessel to sink.

This was true of all but one man! Paul's calm faithful confidence in God defied the violence of wind and wave. Standing in their midst and **believing God**, Paul proclaimed that all would be saved (vv.21-26). Notice how detailed Paul's prophecy was and how in the subsequent events all was fulfilled.

SHIPWRECK AT MELITA (Acts 27:27-44; 28:1-10).

Fourteen nights later the roaring noise of breakers on rocks gave warning of approaching land; this was confirmed by "sounding" (v.28). Anchors were cast from the stern. Early in the morning the sailors attempted to leave the ship for fear of being cast on to the rocks. They were quickly prevented from doing so by Paul (vv.30-32). But when daylight came, it was obvious that the ship was doomed. Again Paul took the initiative. He urged the passengers and crew to eat to fortify themselves for the rigours ahead (vv. 33-34). Taking food, Paul offered thanks to God in the presence of them all, and began to eat. The men took courage and followed his example. Dumping the precious cargo of wheat overboard, they cast off the anchors into the sea, loosed the ropes, hoisted the foresail and made for the beach.

Meeting a crosscurrent channel the ship hit a shoal and began to break up. Julius, out of respect for Paul, prevented the soldiers from killing the prisoners. They all made for the shore, some swimming, some on boards and some on fragments of the ship. All reached the shore safely. Paul's prophetic words had been vindicated and his trust in God justified before all.

The natives of Melita (or Malta) kindled a huge fire to warm the shipwrecked men. Paul, while helping, had a venomous snake fasten onto his hand. Being superstitious, the Maltese were convinced the prisoner Paul was a murderer about to receive his just deserts. Instead of swelling and falling down dead, Paul shook off the viper into the fire, the power of the Holy Spirit protecting him. The islanders were amazed, changed their minds and decided he must be a god instead!

The Apostle figured in a further display of God's power when he healed the father of the local chief, Publius, of a serious "fever of a bloody flux". News of the cure spread and many islanders were healed by Paul.

TO ROME (Acts 28:11-31).

After three months they bade farewell to the islanders who honoured them with their substance. They left on board another Alexandrian corn ship, "whose sign was Castor and Pollux", which had wintered at Malta. They travelled to Syracuse in Sicily, touched at Rhegium, the port on the "toe" of Italy and finally landed at Puteoli (see map). Travel was now by road. At Appii Forum and at The Three Taverns (50-70 km from Rome),

certain brethren who had come from Rome met the three brethren, Paul, Luke and Aristarchus (v.15). They were encouraged and thanked God. There is a lesson here: the thoughtful undertaking of these brethren of Rome assisted Paul in his great missions.

At last Rome! Paul was allowed to rent a private house, although he had a Roman soldier in constant attendance. The apostle, as was his custom in any strange city, gave his first attention to the Jews. Calling the Jewish leaders together after three days, he outlined the events which brought him to Rome. Because the Jews had insisted he was an offender, even though after examination the Romans and Felix would have let him go, he had been compelled to appeal to Caesar. Therefore he was a prisoner in Rome. It was for “the hope of Israel” that he was bound with a chain. A day was appointed for Paul to be heard. In an address which lasted from morning until evening Paul expounded and testified the kingdom of God from the Law and the prophets, and persuaded them that Jesus was Messiah (v.23). Some believed but others did not, and Paul declared this latter reaction to be a fulfillment of the prophet Isaiah (vv.26-27; cp. Isa. 6:9-10).

It was the last appeal of Yahweh through his servants to His people. They had rejected the message and the warning. “Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto **the Gentiles**, and that **they will hear it**” (v.28). The book of Acts commenced with the gospel being preached to the Jews in Jerusalem, the Jewish capital, but ends with it being rejected by them in Rome, the capital of the Gentile world, and the Apostles turning to the Gentiles. One thing remained for the Jews, the outpouring of divine judgment in the overthrow of Jerusalem as predicted by the prophets.

For two years Paul dwelt in his hired house in Rome while awaiting the hearing of his appeal before Nero. He received all that came to him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ (v.31; cp. v.23; 8:12). Against this prison background, he wrote the letters to the Ephesians, Colossians, and Philippians and to Philemon. These letters were full of teaching, of guidance for daily life, and of reproof in the things that would not please Jesus Christ (cp. Phil. 4:4-13). Whatever position we are in, we can show by our actions that the gospel message is active within us (cp. Phil. 1:14). Let us pray with all our hearts, be truthful, honest and of good report that we may have peace with God. Paul, the prisoner of Rome, was able to say with all confidence that he could “do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me”. Jesus Christ will give us strength and courage too, if we trust in him.

LESSONS FOR US:

- Great faith can be seen in God’s Son and His faithful servants such as Paul. It is something only God can help us learn.
- As we learn from God’s Word our faith becomes stronger and we too are able to show others what trust we have in God.

- We can show by our actions that the Gospel message is active within us. There is much for us to **DO** and **BE** if we would copy the example of the Apostle Paul (cp. 1 Cor. 11:1).
- Now is our day of opportunity to “hear”, “believe” and “obey” the call of God through His Word.

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

- “Paul the Apostle” (W. H. Boulton)—Chapter 21
 “The Story of the Bible” (H. P. Mansfield)—Vol. 14, Pages 96-114
 “Archaeology and the New Testament” (Merrill F. Unger)
 —Chapter 17, Pages 304-321
 “Elpis Israel” (J. Thomas)—Pages 223-227

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *What happened on the island of Melita after Paul was shipwrecked?*
2. *In Rome, Paul, though he was a prisoner, was not idle. Comment on this.*
3. *The Book of Acts starts with the apostles being sent out to preach the gospel to the Jews in Jerusalem. How does the Book end?*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *Describe Paul’s journey to Rome, mentioning where he boarded the first ship, where he changed vessels and where he was shipwrecked.*
2. *How did God care for Paul and his companions during the storm and shipwreck on the journey to Rome?*
3. *How is Paul’s faith and courage illustrated by his example during his perilous voyage to Rome?*

20. THE FINAL WORK OF PAUL

“I am now ready to be offered”

In our last lesson we left the apostle Paul in his own hired house preaching and teaching the Gospel. Evidence shows that he was later released, upon which he undertook an extensive preaching tour but had to quickly return to Rome at the outbreak of persecutions. It was at this time that he was again imprisoned awaiting trial. The second letter to Timothy was written giving us his final advice before his death after 30 remarkable years of service to Christ and the ecclesias.

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.

2 Timothy 4

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 dogged determination, despite colossal odds, to fulfil his commission. We wonder at his calm acceptance of trials seeing them as a fellowshipping of 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 AND TIMOTHY.

But as well as that, Paul had an abounding regard for his companions and this regard saw its heights in his relationship with Timothy. The 2nd Epistle of Paul to Timothy reveals that love as a bond between “father” and “son”. There were ecclesias with whom Paul had a special bond, he

had cherished companions, but he had only **one** “son”. Now as he awaited his final defence he yearned for the presence of his “son in the faith”.

Right from the days of Lystra, now some 15 or more years ago, 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 compatability, 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).

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 and promoting the heritage 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 FINAL WORK.

What happened to Paul after the two years in his own hired house at Rome, as described in Acts 28?

It appears from hints in the record and from secular writers of the times that the apostle was released from this house-imprisonment after his first defence. This is deduced from the following evidence:—

1. The Epistles to the Philippians and to Philemon, written during Paul’s first imprisonment in Rome, anticipate release, e.g. “I trust in the Lord that I also myself shall come shortly” (Phil. 2:24). But

contrast that with, "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand" (2 Tim. 4:6).

2. Paul refers to an earlier imprisonment, hearing, discharge and re-imprisonment, "that **ALL** the Gentiles might hear" (2 Tim. 4:16, 17).
3. His recent journey to Rome was different to the one recorded in Acts (2 Tim. 4:13, 20).
4. Historians record Paul's first imprisonment, liberation and subsequent preaching tour. Clement says that Paul reached the "furthest bound of the west". Eusebius says that at the end of the two years imprisonment, Paul went forth again upon the ministry of preaching; and in a second visit to Rome ended his life by martyrdom under Nero, and that during this final imprisonment he wrote the second Epistle to Timothy. Chrysostom and Jerome support this view. Also the Muratorian fragment (A.D. 170) names "the departure of Paul from the city to Spain". Compare this with Paul's hopes in Rom. 15:24.

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 A.D. 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 were 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 imperiled 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).

He yearned for Timothy's presence. No one could console him more than his own "son in the faith". There was almost a "paternal" 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!

PAUL'S ATTITUDE TO 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.

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.
- The interval between Paul's 1st and 2nd imprisonments was taken up in an extensive preaching tour, cut short by the outbreak of persecutions in Rome. Again we have the exhortation to profitably occupy whatever time is granted us in our Master's service, wherever and

whenever possible.

- 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 did Paul do after the events recorded at the end of Acts 28?*
2. *What was Paul's attitude to death?*
3. *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?*

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?*

21. JAMES: JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH AND WORKS

“The just shall live by faith”

When statements made by James and Paul about justification are placed side by side, there appears to be a contradiction of Scripture; namely:

- Paul, “A man is justified by Faith without the deeds of the law” (Rom. 3:28).
- James, “Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only” (Jas. 2:24).

Failure to understand this matter has led some to dismiss the writings of James as an “epistle of straw”.

The aim of this lesson is to grasp the scriptural teaching of JUSTIFICATION and to appreciate the harmony of Paul and James upon the matter, so that our discipleship and teaching might be upon the firm foundation of understanding and reason.

James 2:14-26

WHAT IS JUSTIFICATION?

When Adam sinned he brought the sentence of death not only on himself but upon his posterity: “as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Rom. 5:12). This sin left men with a body mortal (subject to decay and death) and prone to sin. This could not be affirmed of man as God made him. The hereditary inclination to sin has led in fact to sin in all men, apart from the Lord Jesus Christ. It was for this reason that Jesus was born of a virgin, by the intervention of God’s power, so that he could conquer sin and triumph over the grave (Rom. 8:3).

The question arises, how can man, mortal by nature and prone to sin, be justified before God and live forever? Scriptural justification consists of a wiping away of a sinful past, a giving to men of a clear foundation whereon to build works unto life eternal. Because all men are sinners against God, they are guilty before Him (Rom. 3:9-19). The process whereby sinners are forgiven or reconciled to God is called justification. In the New Testament various words have almost the same meaning as the verb “to justify”. We might look upon these as synonyms, viz “make righteous”, “reconcile”, “forgive”, “save”, etc. In fact they all do have slightly different ideas associated with them.

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH AND WORKS.

Faith is confident anticipation of things hoped for (i.e. in the FUTURE), based upon the PAST from which it can be seen that God’s promises and declarations have been fulfilled (Heb. 11:1; Rom. 4:21). Thus faith in God is not unreasonable but based upon the highest reason. Without faith, man cannot please God: favour with God demands as its first step belief in His existence and the understanding that men seek Him not in vain—“He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Heb. 11:6).

There is nothing that sinful man can do **of himself** to enjoy God's favour. In his sinful state, belief or faith is the only way he can "give glory to God" (Rom. 4:20; Jn. 6:29). This faith in God opens the way for God's grace to cover man's sins, or "justify" him. In this sense salvation is of faith and not of works. Paul thus declares, "For by grace are ye saved THROUGH FAITH; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). If man could by works commend himself to God, then essentially he could put God in his debt, demand salvation and boast of his accomplishment (Rom. 4:4). But in the matter of justification or salvation, it is man being reconciled to God, not God to man, so man must comply with the appointments of God.

But once a man is justified by God, **WORKS** will determine everything—a man will be judged "according to his **WORKS**" at the Judgment Seat, and not according to his "faith", which might be just a hollow profession (2 Cor. 5:10; Matt. 16:27). It is faith that inspires works, and works are the evidence of faith.

PAUL'S EMPHASIS ON FAITH.

Paul had to contend against the Jewish approach to God that by keeping the Law of Moses—"the works of the Law"—they could find favour with God. He was at pains to point out that their concept was essentially wrong. He took the case of Abraham who, though he had much to glory of before man so far as works were concerned, had righteousness imputed to him (i.e. was justified) only **when he believed** God (Rom. 4:1-5; Gen. 15:6).

But Paul plainly taught the need for works to follow faith. Every exhortation he gives in his epistles is proof that he taught that works must accompany faith. He told the Philippians to **WORK OUT** their salvation with **FEAR** (of God) and trembling (Phil. 2:12), but pointed out that such works amounted to "God working in them both to will and to do of His good pleasure" (v.13).

Writing to Titus he said that God's love and mercy had appeared to men whereby they were saved, "not by works of righteousness which we have done". He then points out that we are justified by God's grace (almost a synonym for His mercy or love), and puts the matter in balance when he says that those who **BELIEVE** "must be careful to **maintain GOOD WORKS**" (Titus 3:5-8). Hebrews 11, the great chapter on faith, shows clearly the harmony between faith and works: in the Old Testament examples taken we are shown that their actions were motivated by faith.

JAMES' EMPHASIS ON WORKS (Jas. 2:14-26).

James was contending with those in the ecclesia who made a profession of faith, but whose works denied that faith, and so he lays emphasis upon the need for works to accompany faith as its proof: "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him?" (v.14). He then gives the example of one who sees a

destitute brother and who does nothing in a practical way to alleviate his suffering, and declares his faith to be dead (vv.15-17). In verse 18 he says in effect that faith and works are indivisible: it is as impossible to have works without faith as it is to have faith without works: they complement each other. He points out that even maniacs (“the devils”) not only “believe” in God but also shudder. They were no different to them if they did not have the works to show that their faith was not counterfeit!

Then he, like Paul, comes also to the case of Abraham (vv.21-24). When Abraham, a seedless man, believed God’s promise of a multitudinous seed his faith was imputed to him for righteousness: Abraham, the “sinner”, was justified before God (Gen. 15:6). In effect this act of faith made Abraham a “saint” before God. It was not, however, until many years later, when Abraham prepared to slay Isaac, that his faith was made perfect: “faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect”. He was prepared to offer up Isaac, the one through whom the multitudinous seed of Genesis 15:6 was to come (Gen. 22)! Abraham, the “saint”, was therefore justified by works.

James also cites the case of Rahab. She had professed great faith in the God of Israel to the spies (Josh. 2:13), but it was not until she had DONE something—received and sent out the spies another way—that she was justified (Josh. 2:15; Jas. 2:25). Thus actions transcend profession of faith, being the witness of it.

GOD’S RIGHTEOUSNESS IN CHRIST.

No man is able to save himself, but all are dependent upon God’s grace and love. This love is manifest in the giving of His only begotten Son for the life of the world. Whosoever believes in Christ might be saved (Jn. 3:16; Rom. 5:9-10).

In Christ’s death God’s righteousness was declared, because he repudiated his own will and did God’s will even to the point of submitting to the death of the cross (Rom. 3:25-26; Phil. 2:8; Lk. 22:42). God was seen to be “just” in requiring the death of flesh, with its tendencies to sin. Sin was conquered by Christ’s perfect obedience, and God was honoured (Jn. 12:28, 31). God is then pleased to impute righteousness to sinful man upon the same principle as he imputed it to Abraham: belief in what is humanly impossible. We can be justified through **faith** in the name of Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:26).

At this point the words of Bro. R. Roberts should be noted, “God’s method for the return of sinful man to favour required and appointed the putting to death of man’s condemned and evil nature in a representative man of spotless character whom He should provide, to declare and uphold the righteousness of God, as the first condition of restoration, that He might be just while justifying the unjust, who should believably approach through him in humility, confession and restoration” (“Diary of a Voyage” page 68).

Baptism is the first work of obedience and the first evidence of faith. All other works done before will NOT justify a man before God: he must believe and be baptised into Christ, for salvation is bound up with his

name only (Acts 4:12).

In baptism the believer identifies himself with the principles seen in the death and resurrection of Christ. God forgives his sins and justifies him so that he has “peace” with God (Rom. 5:1). He symbolically dies with Christ when he passes under the water: the old man or old way of life is buried; and he rises from the water a new man, even as Christ was raised to a newness of life (Rom. 6:1-6).

LESSONS FOR US:

- Faith justifies the “sinner”, but works justify the “saint”: once in Christ we must be doers of the Word and not hearers only (Jas. 1:22), for we shall be judged by our works.
- God’s righteousness is set forth in the death of Christ. By faith in him, believers are justified when they are baptised (1 Cor. 6:11).
- The example of Abraham shows the principle of justification by faith (when he believed God’s promise of a multitudinous seed, Gen. 15) and justification by works (when he was willing to offer up Isaac believing God would raise him from the dead as the seed of promise, Gen. 22).

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

“Epistle to the Romans” (J. Carter)—Pages 39-55

“Elpis Israel” (J. Thomas)—Pages 258-261

“Epistle of James” (N. Smart)—Chapter 6

“James” (J. Martin)—C.S.S.S. Study Notes

“The Blood of Christ” (R. Roberts)

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *How was Abraham justified before God?*
2. *What is the purpose of baptism in God’s plan of redemption?*
3. *How did Christ’s death set forth the righteousness of God?*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *What is the relationship between faith and works in God’s scheme of justification?*
2. *Write an essay showing how Paul’s and James’ teaching on justification harmonize. Use the example of Abraham to illustrate your answer.*
3. *How can man be justified by God?*

Section 3

PREPARING FOR CHRIST

The end of Paul's life saw the completion of the task assigned to the apostles—to be witnesses to Christ “unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Yet in the face of triumph, there lay the threat of apostasy.

So it transpired. When the apostles died, apostasy set in, and darkness returned. But even in the midst of the long darkness of Gentile power, the light of the Truth flickered, ready to be rekindled in the nineteenth century. Christ had suggested that some would be alive to welcome him when he returned as the bridegroom (Matt. 25:1-13). Consistent with this and other scriptures, there has been a latter-day revival of the Truth.

We have received a great heritage in being brought today within the Truth's environment, but God still seeks our personal response. The last section of our lessons shows how we should respond in order to be prepared for the coming King.

22. APOSTASY AND REVIVAL OF THE TRUTH

“When the Son of man cometh, shall he find the faith on the earth?”

Paul wrote to Timothy, “This know also that in the last days perilous times shall come”, and he listed the evil characteristics from which God’s people must stand apart (2 Tim. 3:1-5). The Lord also foresaw the difficulty of trusting in God in a world of material values and loose moral standards. He drew attention to the difficulty in standing apart from evil and said that few would be prepared to do so. Since the apostolic age, outside influences have led to apostasy. God has, however, preserved a remnant over the ages and has in these latter days caused the Truth to re-emerge.

The aim of this lesson is to understand how the Truth was corrupted, and the wonderful way in which it has been revived in the last days.

2 Thess. 2

CHRISTENDOM ASTRAY.

The doctrinal foundations upon which Christendom rests are not those of the First Century Ecclesia. Its teaching is a mixture of errors which produces the works of the flesh and not the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:17-26). Thus Christendom is powerless to save from sin and death.

Error crept into the early ecclesias because the Truth requires sacrifice and discipline, which has no appeal to fleshly minded people (Matt. 7:14; Rom. 8:7-8). Corruption from “The Way” occurred because the corrupters made appeal to:—

1. The lusts and desires of the flesh (2 Pet. 2:18-22; Jude 4)
2. The human imagination (Jude 8)
3. The pride of life (Jude 16; 1 Tim. 6:4-5)
4. The desire for riches, comfort and a release from earnestly contending for the faith (2 Pet. 2:3; 2 Tim. 3:1-8; 1 Tim. 6:10).

NEW TESTAMENT WARNINGS.

Within two generations from the apostles, the New Testament had been written, and the purpose for which the Holy Spirit was given had been accomplished (1 Cor. 13:8-10). One by one the apostles died in the service of the Truth which they loved, until only John was left. The aged apostle wrote:

“Little children, it is the last hour: as ye heard that antichrist cometh, even now have there arisen many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest, how that they are not of us” (1 Jn. 2:18-19 RV).

Those described as “antichrists” taught wrong doctrine concerning the sacrifice of Christ: they denied that he had “come in the flesh” (4:1-3). The Lord and the apostles had frequently warned of the growth of false teaching (cp. Matt. 24:24; Acts 20:29-30; 1 Tim. 4:1-5; 2 Pet. 2:1-3; Jude 18).

The letters of Christ to the ecclesias in Revelation 2 and 3 witness the decline that had already commenced.

HISTORY OF THE DECLINE.

By the fourth century Christianity had become, by the decree of the Emperor Constantine, the official religion of the State with the Bishop of Rome the “head of all the churches”. The clergy organised themselves into an elaborate system of priesthood, and discouraged the common people from privately studying the Scriptures. They kept the people ignorant of the Scriptures, set aside the doctrine of Christ’s Millennial reign on earth and introduced doctrines such as the Trinity, Immortality of the Soul, Hell Torments and Heaven-going. They taught that the world would be ultimately converted by the Roman Church and that the Pope and the clergy were to be revered as God’s representatives on earth.

Christianity became paganised and commercialised, the people being impressed by the ritual and ornate churches and cathedrals. The higher offices of the church were eagerly sought after by the leaders. Thus the “Mystery of Iniquity”, whose elements were present even in the first century, was born as the state religion in A.D. 313, and was headed by the Bishop of Rome by A.D. 610. By A.D. 800 it was fully developed and joined with the German Emperor, Charlemagne, to form the Holy Roman Empire.

In 2 Thessalonians 2, Paul describes this system as “the man of sin”, with the Pope at its head “sitting in the temple of God showing himself that he is God” (vv. 3-4). Its confessionals, purgatory, indulgences, celibacy, image worship and relics have well-earned it the description “the working of Satan with all the power and signs and lying wonders” (v.9). Though lasting for many years it will be destroyed at Christ’s coming (v.8).

While this state of spiritual darkness continued, the true witnesses existed as small and persecuted minorities who were branded as heretics by “the church”. They often sealed their faithful testimony with their own blood (e.g. Rev. 6:9-11). Some of these communities were known as Novations, Donatists, Paulicians, Albigenses, Waldenses and Huguenots. It was not until the French Revolution (1790), that the iron grip of the Church-State relationship was broken and in 1870 the Pope lost all his temporal power. By then men were reading the Bible without fear and many had broken away from the Roman Church. But in these last days various pressures such as evolution, materialism, and communism have sapped belief in God and bred atheism and immorality.

REVIVAL OF THE TRUTH.

The scriptures indicate that a remnant will be waiting for Christ when he returns (1 Cor. 15:51-58; 1 Thess. 4:15-18). When the right time came for a revival in these latter days, Providence could be seen at work. The invention of the printing press and the translation of the Bible into different languages meant that more and more people were able to read the Bible. As they understood, they began to challenge the commonly accepted but wrong views of the Roman Catholic Church. Men like William Tyndale in England and Martin Luther in Germany, from their Bible studies exposed some of the false doctrines of Rome. Others joined them in the struggle of protest against Rome, which was known as the Reformation and the Reformed or Protestant Churches were established. Their reforms, however, were incomplete and much of the tradition and false teaching of the Roman Church was retained. Some small groups though saw the need to take the reforms much further and some, such as the "Brethren of Christ" in 16th century Poland, came substantially to the Truth. God had not left Himself without a witness in the earth.

In the early nineteenth century a revival movement commenced particularly in the U.S.A., and in 1832 John Thomas, a doctor of medicine, found himself against his will in the midst of this revival. He wanted neither controversy nor to be an expositor of the Word. He merely wanted to sit down quietly and reach his own conclusions on the teachings of the scriptures.

Circumstances did not permit this, however, and it became apparent that God was using him to reveal the Truth in the latter days, and he could not refrain from speaking (cp. Jer. 20:9). On the foundation laid by his labours, others have since built and are building. Notwithstanding the work of others, however, the history of the revival of the Truth in the latter days centres around the life of Dr. Thomas. All students are encouraged to read "Life and Works of Dr. Thomas", noting that at all times his appeal was to the Word of God. — "The Bible is the enlightener. If men would not be carried about by every wind that blows, let them study this. It will unfold to them the future and make them wiser than the world" (Elpis Israel, page 385). This has remained the standard practice of Christadelphians ever since. Every attempt to explain the Bible must be tested by the Bible itself (Isa. 8:20).

KEY TO THE REVIVAL.

The key which unfolds the message of the Scriptures is the "hope of Israel" (Acts 28:20). Dr. Thomas saw clearly that "salvation is of the Jews" (Jn. 4:22), and that the promises made to Abraham (Gen. 12-22) and to David (2 Sam. 7), have their fulfilment in Christ (Gal. 3:16; Lk. 1:32-33). These promises require a return of the Jews to Palestine at the time of the return of Christ and of the resurrection of the dead (Rom. 11:15; Acts 3:19-21).

Then Dr. Thomas came to realise that the scriptures taught that man is mortal because of sin and that at death he ceases to have any conscious

existence. His only hope lies in the resurrection when Christ returns (1 Cor. 15:16-23). Thus he exposed the error of the doctrine of the immortality of the soul (Ezek. 18:4). Further to this, if man was unconscious in death (Ecc. 9:5, 10), then the teachings of immediate reward (in heaven) or punishment (in hell) upon death must likewise be false. Thus the whole fabric of church doctrine was exposed as false. Dr. Thomas came to realise that toleration of error had brought about apostasy in the first place. As he contended for “the faith once delivered to the saints” (Jude 3), he realised that he must separate his followers from the churches, that the Truth might survive and be presented more clearly.

Dr. Thomas was also a great writer and many of his writings are still in demand and are often called “standard works”, viz. “Elpis Israel”, “Eureka”, “Phanerosis”, “Anastasis” and “Faith in the Last Days”. Through his work done in England, he was joined by Robert Roberts, another prolific writer and first editor of the “Christadelphian” magazine which tied the Christadelphian communities together as men and women came out of the darkness of the world and the established churches and saw the glorious light of the Truth.

LESSONS FOR US:

- The Gospel was corrupted because wrong doctrine was tolerated (Rev. 2:14, 20). Where the Truth is at stake, there can be no tolerance of error. Matters of personal weakness, however, should be treated differently, and there should always be readiness to forgive in the case of personal offence (Lk. 17:3-4; 2 Cor. 2:6-8; Gal. 6:1).
- The Truth has been revived but its adherents are few in number. In every age believers have eventually fallen victim to their own environment. There is a desperate need for us to put away those things that might seduce us from our “first love”, e.g. T.V., worldly magazines and books, activities and friends outside the ecclesia—that the Gospel might be preserved in doctrine and practice.
- Instead of following the rebellious attitudes that cause a breakdown in family life, or the permissiveness the world condones, we should make it our business to know the commandments of Christ and to keep them.
- If the Faith is to be preserved in our days we must give diligent attention to God’s Word and practice its precepts.
- God has never left the world to itself but through His angels He “rules in the kingdom of men” and controls the movements of men and nations.

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

- “Thirteen Lectures on the Apocalypse” (R. Roberts)—Revelation 2, 3
- “God’s Way” (J. Carter)—Part II of Chapters. 2, 3, 9, 10
- “Man of Sin” (R. Abel)—C.S.S.S. Study Notes
- “Dr. Thomas: His Life and Work” (R. Roberts)

“The Faith in the Last Days” (J. Thomas)—Pages 1-45
“The Protesters” (A. Eyre)

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *Who were the antichrists of whom the Apostle John spoke?*
2. *What means has God used to bring about the revival of the Truth in these last days?*
3. *Name one of the keys which led to a clearer understanding of the Gospel in the revival of the last days.*
4. *List five apostolic doctrines which were corrupted by false teachers.*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *What effect has environment had upon the Truth throughout the ages? Illustrate your answer with examples.*
2. *What were some of the factors which brought about the development of the apostasy?*
3. *What are our responsibilities towards God and His Truth in these last days? Discuss both doctrinal and moral aspects.*

23. BAPTISM

“He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved”

The Lord committed “the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven” to Peter (Matt. 16:19). Peter used these “keys” to open the door of the kingdom to the Jews (Acts 2:37-38) and then to the Gentiles (Acts 10:44-48). He showed that baptism identified a believer with God’s Son and by it sins were washed away (Acts 2:38). Thousands were baptised after Peter preached at Pentecost; and likewise the Samaritans and the Ethiopian eunuch responded to Philip’s preachings. Later Paul was baptised and he commanded baptism of believers at the ecclesias he established (Acts 2:41; 8:12-13, 36-38; 9:18; 10:47-48; 16:14-15, 33; 18:8; 19:5). Although “baptism into the name of Jesus Christ” was first proclaimed by the apostles of the Lord, the principles underlying it were not; they were also taught in the Law of Moses, and even in Eden itself.

The aim of this lesson is to see the importance and significance of baptism.

Romans 6

WHAT IS BAPTISM?

The English word “baptise” is derived from the Greek word “baptiso”. It means “to dip” or “to plunge” and was used among the Greeks to signify the dyeing of a garment by immersing it in a dyeing fluid. By baptism, or immersion in water, a believer submits to a simple act with a profound significance: his old way of life is buried as completely as is a dead body. His sins are forgiven and thenceforth he should reveal not old habits but those of a converted person whose life is fashioned after the example of Christ (Rom. 13:14).

There is no suggestion in the Bible that baptism was by sprinkling, but rather that it entailed immersion in water. Moreover, seeing baptism entailed faith and repentance, it was never performed on babies. It was the established practice in Apostolic days by which a believer was inducted into Christ.

BAPTISM ESSENTIAL TO SALVATION.

Jesus declared “he that believeth and is baptised shall be saved” (Mk. 16:16); earlier he had said to Nicodemus, “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (Jn. 3:5). Paul taught that by baptism into Christ we can become heirs of the promise of eternal life (Gal. 3:27-29). In addition, Peter said that “baptism doth also now save us” (1 Pet. 3:20-21). Each of these passages shows that baptism is not optional but essential for salvation.

PRINCIPLES IN EDEN.

When Adam and Eve sinned, God made coats of skins and clothed

them (Gen. 3:21). This was in contrast with their own attempt to cover themselves with fig leaves (Gen. 3:7). They had attempted to cover their sin and shame by their own efforts. But they needed to honour God by recognising that they had sinned and broken His law. God required the “shedding of blood” for the remission of sins (Heb. 9:22). Death was the divinely appointed penalty for sin (Gen. 3:19). The correctness of this law had to be acknowledged as a basis for salvation.

PRINCIPLES IN THE LAW OF MOSES.

The Law of Moses taught the same principles in its sacrificial code as Adam and Eve were taught in Genesis 3:21. In each offering, life was required. The offerer acknowledged that the death inflicted on the sacrifice really was the just penalty belonging to him, the sinner, for he held the head of the slain animal. As the life blood was shed and the animal slowly became limp and died, the graphic lesson would be taught him that “the wages of sin is death” and that for life to be gained there must be sacrifice (Lev. 1:3-5; 3:2, 8; 4:4, 15, 24). The Lord Jesus Christ was the spotless Lamb of God, typically “slain in Eden”—the “foundation of the world”—through whom our sins might be covered (Isa. 53:7; Jn. 1:29; Rev. 13:8).

PRE-REQUISITE TO BAPTISM.

Before baptism it is essential to have a clear understanding of the gospel, which consists of two elements—the things concerning the Kingdom of God and the Name of Jesus Christ (cp. Acts 8:12). The Ethiopian eunuch had to receive instruction before he had sufficient understanding for baptism (Acts 8:30-39). When Paul preached, “the Corinthians **hearing, believed and were baptised**” (Acts 18:8).

There must also be a willingness to comply with the command of the Lord Jesus Christ (Mk. 16:15-16; Matt. 28:19-20).

SIGNIFICANCE OF BAPTISM (Romans 6).

Romans chapter 6 explains the meaning of baptism. In verse 1 the question is asked, “Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?” It had been suggested by some that Paul was encouraging sin seeing he placed such emphasis upon God’s abounding grace. But the answer is an emphatic “No.” “Let it not be. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?” (v.2). He proceeds to show that baptism terminates a life of service to sin and commences a new life of service to God.

Verses 2-8 explain in detail the significance of baptism. Baptism has a negative significance—it is a symbolic death. Since dead bodies cannot sin, a saint in effect has died with Christ in baptism and so cannot serve sin thereafter. The “old man”, or his past way of life which did service to Sin (personified in v.6 as a “slave master”), was “crucified with Christ”.

But baptism also has a positive significance. When the believer emerges from the water of baptism he is “raised” with Christ. As Christ rose

from the dead to newness of life, so the believer rises to the new moral principles of Christ (v.4; Col. 3:1). His former life did not reflect glory to God, but the new life of the disciple must show forth the praises of God: "like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life". In his obedience to death Jesus glorified God, but in resurrection he was glorified by the Father (Jn. 12:28; 17:1). There is no honour or glory to God in mere submission to a ritual. God is honoured when the "newness of life" can be seen in the changed life of the believer. He must "live unto God" (vv. 8-11): his conduct must be governed by faith in God so that "it is God which worketh in him both to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13).

Sin is also personified as a "king". Because all sin, all are under his dominion. The believer must not allow his body to be governed by "King Sin". Rather the saint must "yield himself to God, as one that is alive from the dead" (vv.12-14).

In verses 21-23 the apostle Paul contrasts the end of a life in service to sin with that in which God is served. The former master pays wages which are death, but God does not pay His servants wages for no amount of work done could ever merit eternal life. Eternal life being beyond price or wage is described by the apostle as the "gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord".

PRINCIPLES IN DAILY LIFE.

The simple act of baptism is the "answer of a good conscience towards God" (1 Pet. 3:21). The baptised believer must see that he is responsible to God in a very special way. He must endeavour to obey the commandments in his daily life; he must follow the example of Jesus Christ (Lk. 14:26-27). Seeing he has been bought "with the precious blood of Christ," he belongs to the Father, and must not please himself (Rom. 15:1-3). The garments of the "new man" which he must now put on are listed in Col.3:10-17 to which the student should refer.

BAPTISMAL PROCEDURE.

In apostolic times care was exercised to ensure that repentance and belief were present as a proper basis for baptism (Acts 2:38). Because of the prevailing apostasy it is essential for Christadelphians to instruct those seeking baptism in the fundamentals of the Gospel. Teaching the first principles of the Faith to a baptismal candidate is a responsible duty and care must be taken to ensure that there is a proper grasp of the Truth and the obligations that go with it. In our Statement of Faith there are doctrines to be received and doctrines to be rejected as well as the commandments of Christ. The Statement of Faith forms the basis of Fellowship common to Christadelphians throughout the world.

Upon belief and confession of the Faith the believer is baptised for the remission of sins. With baptism comes access to God in prayer through

the name of Christ, and fellowship with the Brotherhood of Christ throughout the world. In the life which follows the believer must grow in understanding, faith, hope and love.

LESSONS FOR US:

- The Lord Jesus Christ taught that baptism into his name is essential for the remission of sins.
- The principles underlying baptism were taught by the provision of coats of skins in Eden, and in the Law of Moses by the sacrifice of animals.
- In baptism the believer aligns himself with the principles of the death and resurrection of Christ: the old way of life is buried with Christ and he rises to a new way of life as Christ rose to a newness of life.
- Baptism is a symbolic ritual, but its true significance must be transferred into practice in daily life.
- The act of baptism is the most serious step which can be taken by a person. It should not be entered without recognition of the responsibilities which it entails.

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

- “Elpis Israel” (J. Thomas)—Pages 53, 135, 188-209
“Key to the Understanding of the Scriptures” (H. P. Mansfield)
—Lesson 7
“Faith in the Last Days” (J. Thomas)—Chapter 29
“Christendom Astray” (R. Roberts)—Lecture 17
“Christadelphian Instructor”—Questions 62, 63
“God’s Way” (J. Carter)—Chapter 11

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *What is the importance and significance of baptism?*
2. *Explain why the fig leaf device made by Adam and Eve was not acceptable to God.*
3. *What must take place **before** a person is baptised?*
4. *What are some of the qualities which belong to the “new man” in Christ?*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *Although baptism into the name of Jesus Christ was new in the Apostolic era, its principles were not. How were these principles taught:*
 - (a) *In the Garden of Eden?*
 - (b) *In the Law of Moses?*
2. *Write an essay setting out Paul’s teaching about the significance of baptism in Romans chapter 6.*
3. *How does baptism align the believer with the death and resurrection of Christ?*

24. HOW TO BE READY FOR THE COMING KING

“Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God”

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 the one 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. How much more zealous should we be, for we live on the verge of a greater manifestation of Divine power. The question confronting us is: “How can we prepare ourselves for his coming?”

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.

Ephesians 6

IN THE WORLD — NOT OF IT.

Paul taught the Ephesians that the servant of Christ cannot walk in the way of the world. Those who do so are “children of wrath” (Eph. 2:3). 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).

Brethren of Christ are called upon to separate themselves from their evil environment, being aware that God sees all. Pure religion entails being “unspotted from the world” (Jas. 1:27). Christ’s body, his ecclesia, must be separate from the world — holy, chaste and pure. While “in the world”, his brethren must not be “of the world” (Jn. 17:14, 15). Such an attitude will not be found in any of the world’s institutions.

OUR INESTIMABLE PRIVILEGES (Eph. 1-3).

Although repudiation of what the world finds attractive brings ridicule, Paul reminds us of the privileges we have in the Truth. God has blessed us “with all spiritual blessings” (Eph. 1:3); He has “made us accepted in the beloved” (1:6; 2:6). Some of the words which Paul repeatedly uses in Ephesians emphasise the wonderful status of Christ’s brethren, e.g. “grace” (12 times), “peace” (7 times), “heavenly places” (4 times). In fact, the first three chapters of Ephesians dwell upon the comforts, hopes and joys of those “in Christ”, and a contrast is drawn with their former life as Gentiles “without hope”.

THE NEED FOR SUBMISSION (Eph. 4-6).

This divine favour brings with it responsibilities. In the final three chapters of Ephesians, Paul enumerates the practical issues of

discipleship. The greatest problem we face in living the life that God commends is selfishness. So the first thing we must learn is submission one to another (5:21). In daily life mutual submission is called for in the relationships between husbands and wives (5:22-33), children and parents (6:1-4), and servants and masters (vv. 5-9).

HUSBANDS AND WIVES (Eph. 5:22-33).

As Paul explains it, the husband-wife relationship is intended to be a miniature of what is true, on a larger scale, of Christ and his ecclesia — the “second Adam” and “second Eve”. In the symbolic sense, Adam had “died” to produce Eve, whose companionship thereafter made his life complete and happy. In the same way, Christ died to produce his “bride”, the perfected ecclesia—but happiness would not be experienced unless there had been firstly his willingness to die for her and secondly her willingness to follow his example of selfless, sacrificial love. The same principles should govern marriage in the Lord where the husband performs the role of Christ, and the wife, his ecclesia. Paul’s emphasis is upon the duty each has to the other and not upon one’s “rights”. Where both parties submit to each other in love, discord and divorce, so prevalent in these last perilous days, cannot eventuate.

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

Earlier Paul admonished the Ephesians, “Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children” (5:1). There is a Divine family, in which Yahweh is Father and we His children (3:14-15). Every family is expected to be a replica of the Divine 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 covered by the mantle of Christ, the willing obedience he gave his Father will find reflection in the attitude of children to parents. Conversely, his Father’s loving care and concern for him, will see its counterpart in parents’ concern for their children.

In the spirit of the fifth commandment, Paul says that fathers “in the Lord” are not to be despotic or lack sympathy, for such harshness inspires irritation, exasperation and bitterness in children. On the contrary, they are to bring them up in the “nurture (“discipline”, RSV) and admonition (“instruction”, RSV) of the Lord”. This phrase indicates our Heavenly Father’s concern that our minds might be instructed and our way of life disciplined according to His will. Heavy responsibility is placed upon parents: since they play the part of Yahweh Himself, they must always reveal His love and faithfulness towards His 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. Where it is not preserved, social and national disintegration will follow.

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

While the “servants” Paul had in mind were bondslaves (considered as “property” in the Roman world, to be used or abused by their masters), and while the “masters” he referred to were owners of slaves, the principles which should have governed their relationship apply to “employees” and “employers” in the modern world.

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 himself. Whatever we do then should be done “as to the Lord” (Col. 3:22-25).

Masters or employers are called upon to show to employees the same generous and benevolent attitude that they would seek from them. Coercion antagonizes and destroys the spirit of free and willing service. In the world of today unions of workers are opposed to employers, and the spirit of grace which should exist between them is often lost. Strikes to force claims are all too commonplace. Masters and servants in Christ all have one master, the Lord Jesus Christ, whose judgments will be impartial. This appreciation should caution self-interest and impress the need to render loving service to others. In every way, life in Christ is a matter of mutual submission.

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

When a person accepts Christ, he adopts and maintains principles that find opposition in virtually every sphere of life. Hence life becomes a struggle which Paul likens to warfare (cp. 2 Tim. 2:3-5). The saint engaging in 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). Thus 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; Isa. 11:5).

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 (Jn. 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. Our hearts and minds are protected by the righteous laws of God dwelling within us (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 was necessary in order to show 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 so as to cover the whole body. 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.

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 Isa. 59:17, Christ is said to have “put an helmet of salvation upon his head”. For the ecclesia to do likewise is to virtually “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)—Pages 141-153
“Ephesians” (J. Knowles)

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *List some of the privileges of discipleship mentioned by Paul in Ephesians?*
2. *Marriage in the Truth should be a miniature of the relationship between Christ and the ecclesia. Explain.*
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.*
2. *“Submission” is a key principle in the Epistle to the Ephesians. How does Paul illustrate the principle, and why is it important to believers?*

25. SIGNS THAT HERALD CHRIST'S RETURN

“Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments”

The Kingdom of God is near at hand. Christ's return is on the verge of becoming a reality. There are many events in the world that remind us of these things.

The aim of this lesson will be to consider some of these signs so that we might be steadfast as society collapses about us.

2 Tim. 3; Rev. 16

CULMINATION OF THE SIGNS.

We have before us many wonderful signs that herald the appearance of Israel's Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, to re-establish the Kingdom of God (1 Chron. 29:23; Acts 1:6, 7; 3:20, 21). The Lord said that such signs would be numerous (Lk. 21:25). Because these signs are all happening at the same time we know that we are living at the very epoch of Christ's return. Some may have been evident in degree during the “times of the Gentiles” (e.g. moral decline, violence), but they have never all come to pass at the one time, nor to the extent that we now behold. We do not know “the day nor the hour” of his appearing, but we do know that his coming is nigh (Matt. 24:32-41).

THE DECLINE OF TURKISH POWER (Rev. 16:12-16).

The River “Euphrates” is mentioned twice in the book of Revelation (9:14; 16:12), and in both cases it refers to the Turkish Empire, through which that mighty river ran. The first reference prophesied the rise of Turkey, and the second its “drying up” or fall (cp. Jer. 50:38), so that “the way of the kings of the east (lit. ‘the kings who are out of a sun's rising’) might be prepared”. These “kings” are the glorified saints, who will emerge from obscurity with Christ, the “Sun of Righteousness” (Mal. 4:2).

It is a strange and wonderful sign, for Turkey (as the Ottoman power) once occupied a vast empire in Europe, Asia and Africa; it was almost as if the Euphrates had flooded and spilled over the world. Then commencing in the year 1820, little by little the empire receded as country after country rebelled and regained independence. It was just like a flood receding. As the water dried up, “frogs” were heard “croaking”; “three unclean spirits like frogs” went forth to prepare the nations for Armageddon (Rev. 16:13-14, 16). “Three frogs” were part of the ancient heraldry of French kings (see “Elpis Israel”, pp. 375-382). They truly represent the voice of the earth, from which came the three-fold cry of the French Revolution, “Liberty! Equality! Fraternity!” This cry signaled the birth of modern socialism and communism. The spirit of socialism has created political chaos and has profoundly affected the policies of Rome, of the East and of the West, and it will yet gather the nations to Armageddon. This prophecy is being fulfilled before our eyes, as the fore-runner to Christ's return (v. 15).

THE RETURN OF THE JEWS.

Many prophecies foretell Israel's return to their own land (e.g. Jer. 30:10-11, 18; 31:10-11, 15-17, 31-34; 32:37-40; 33:15-16, etc.). But most of these prophecies concern events to happen **after** Christ's advent, not **before**. Thus, care is needed to distinguish the relatively few prophecies which concern the partial and primary restoration of **pre-adventual days**, from those which have a **post-adventual** application. Bro. Thomas' accurate forecast of Jewry's "pre-adventual colonisation of Palestine" (Elpis Israel pp. 441-442) was based upon Ezek. 38:11-13, which clearly states that the land would be inhabited by Jews, prior to the invasion by Russia and the accompanying Divine intervention (see also vv.8, 16 and in ch. 39 note the pre-adventual situation of Jewry in vv.7, 9 and the post-adventual situation in vv. 25-29). Other prophecies requiring the Jews to be back in Israel prior to Christ's return are Zech. 12:9-10; 14:1-4; Joel 3:1-3, 14-16; Matt. 23:39 and Rom. 11:25-26.

RETURN OF JERUSALEM TO JEWISH CONTROL.

On June 8, 1967, in the "Six Day War" between Israel and her neighbours, Israel regained Jerusalem. The Lord had said, "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles **until** the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled" (Lk. 21:24). The fact that Jerusalem is no longer trodden underfoot of the nations and is free after nineteen centuries shows us that we live in the last days.

Several other passages also indicate that Jerusalem would be in Jewish hands when Christ returns. Zechariah indicated this (14:2), and Joel speaks not only of the return of the Jews ("Judah") to their land, but also of the return of Jerusalem to their possession (3:1). Daniel was given a time period of 2,300 years spanning the time the Greeks would overthrow the Persians, until the sanctuary would be cleansed (Dan. 8:13-14). It is significant that there were exactly 2,300 years from the battles of Granicus and Issus, B.C. 334-333 (when Greece defeated Persia), and the surrender of Jerusalem to Alexander the Great, until the old city of Jerusalem, including the Temple area, was recaptured by the Jews (1967).

THE RISE OF RUSSIA TO WORLD POWER (Ezek. 38).

The rise of Russia, politically, militarily and geographically, is one of the greatest phenomena of history. The seeds of communism, broadcast into the world by the French Revolution, took political root in Russia. The land mass dominated by Russia today is so vast that it covers one-sixth of the earth.

Ezekiel 38 is a very clear prophecy concerning the invasion of the land of Israel by a mighty power which would confederate other nations together. These nations are smitten upon the mountains of Israel. It is notable that this power invades the land of "Israel", which is peopled with Jews restored to their homeland (v.8). This is not only

a fact today, as never before (the name Israel has only been re-used since 1948), but the obvious policy of Russia in this region is to gain power and subjugate it, exactly as the prophet foretold.

But how can we be sure it is Russia that is addressed as “Gog” in verse 2?

1. Gog is described as the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. But in the Revised Version margin, Gog is said to be the “prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal”. These are the ancient names of Russia, Moscow and Tobolski, respectively.
2. This power is said to be north of Israel, as is Russia (vv. 6, 15).
3. The time of the invasion is said to be the “latter years”, in which we now live (vv.8, 16).
4. Gog is described as being a “guard” or sentinel over a vast confederacy of nations (v.7). Today Russia holds in subjection behind the “iron curtain” the “satellite” states of Eastern Europe — exactly as foretold. This prophecy also indicates that other nations in Western Europe will yet come under her dominion (“Magog” — Germany; “Gomer” — France, etc.), as well as “Libya”, “Ethiopia” and “Persia” whose ancient territory encompassed Afghanistan as well as modern Iran.

Thus we are witnessing prophecy being fulfilled before our eyes. Bro. John Thomas clearly foretold these developments in 1848 when Russia was but an insignificant power, and prior to the Jewish return (see *Elpis Israel*, preface, p. XX).

THE ARMS RACE AND INTERNATIONAL TENSION.

Joel anticipated the enormous build-up of armaments which would occur at the time of the Jew’s return to Judah and Jerusalem (3:9-11). The cost of the armaments produced in the world today is astronomical (an estimated \$2.3 million every minute) and is increasing.

Christ said there would be “distress of nations, with perplexity” (Lk. 21:25). The word “perplexity” comes from a Greek word meaning “at a loss for a way; no solution, being at one’s wits end; without resources; at a loss how to proceed”. Tension arising from inability to solve great problems is evident in most nations today. The threat of nuclear war, crime, violence and corruption, pollution, widespread poverty, the population explosion and famine are just a few of the perplexities that face the leaders of the world today. No man or combination of men have the solutions to these complex problems. Not only do these things forewarn us of the return of Christ, but they also convince us of the need for his return.

EAST V. WEST.

The East-West struggle of the “latter days” is depicted in Ezekiel 38 as a struggle of two groups of nations upon Israel’s land — attackers and defenders. The defenders are called “the Merchants of Tarshish” (v.13),

a phrase used in ancient times of maritime powers whose bases were elsewhere, and whose interest in the area was trade. The attackers control the land-mass of Eurasia, with bases in Africa (Ethiopia and Libya), and seek to link Europe and Asia by conquest of Israel and the Middle East. Today, the Russian pincers reach out to Western Europe, the northern pincer by land-based power, the southern pincer by sea-based power through the Mediterranean Sea; Israel, Egypt, Arabia and the Gulf States stand in the way of Soviet ambition in Africa and the Indian Ocean. The nations of the west must resist by force the Soviet invasion, if they themselves are to survive. Events since World War 2 thus confirm the prophetic pattern, and make it evident that we are on the eve of the second advent of our Lord.

A DISINTEGRATING WORLD.

Consider these factors which characterise the world today:

- The failure of political and church systems of the Gentiles—“The sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven” (Matt. 24:29; cp. Lk. 21:25).
- Widespread violence and anarchy—“As it was in the days of Noah . . .” (Lk. 17:26-27). “The wickedness of man was great in the earth . . . the earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence” (Gen. 6:5, 11).
- Unprecedented affluence, technology and materialism—“This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come . . . lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God” (2 Tim. 3:1-4). Greed and selfishness are condoned and even admired in a world that knows not God and has no perception of what sin is.
- Widespread decline of morals—“Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot . . .” (Lk. 17:28-29). “But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before Yahweh exceedingly” (Gen. 13:13).
- Unbelief brought about by atheistic communism, evolution and materialism have left society bereft of the only influence able to refine it — the fear of God.

Paul said that the following characteristics would prevail among men in such a society — **TODAY’S SOCIETY** (2 Tim. 3:1-4):

“**Disobedient to parents**”: a breakdown of family authority.

“**Unthankful**”: creatures of self-interest and self-will, lacking in gratitude, or appreciation of blessings bestowed from above.

“**Unholy**”: profane and obscene.

“**Without natural affection**”: inhuman, lacking in love for kindred. In practical terms this amounts to a flagrant breach of the Second Commandment, “thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself”. Its effects can be seen in a breakdown in the standards, morals, and relationships in society, essential to a happy and orderly life.

“**Trucebreakers**”: men who do not honour contracts or pledges, whether in marriage, family responsibilities, or business.

“**False accusers**”: slanderers, people vicious both in what they say and intend.

“**Incontinent**”: lacking self-control.

“**Fierce**”: untamed, savage, unapproachable.

“**Despisers of those that are good**”: people who repudiate and scorn those who practise righteousness.

“**Traitors**”: betrayers, men lacking in integrity and guilty of basic dishonesty — the seed of Judas Iscariot (cp. Lk. 6:16).

SIGNS FOR US.

The Lord Jesus Christ said that there would be “signs” heralding his return. Just as a signpost indicates an approaching landmark, so the signs given in the Word tell us that the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.

The question remains — who will understand and heed these signs? Not the Gentile world. Not apostate Christendom. Not the brethren and sisters of Christ who may have been led away from the Truth. The angel of Yahweh told Daniel, “the wise shall understand”. Paul told Timothy, “the holy scriptures are able to make thee wise unto salvation” (2 Tim. 3:15). May we heed the “signs” and the wise counsel of Paul to Timothy.

LESSONS FOR US:

- We know that Christ’s advent is near, for all the signs of his coming are evident in the world:—
 - the decline of the Turkish power
 - the emergence of communism and its impact upon East and West, and upon Rome;
 - the return of the Jews;
 - the restoration of Jerusalem to Jewish control;
 - the rise of Russia;
 - the arms race and growing international tension;
 - a world divided into two antagonistic camps, East and West;
 - a world in disarray because it has rejected the moral principles taught only by the Word and which are essential for order and happiness.
- As the second coming of the Lord is near at hand, the wise will understand, do his will, and in patience wait for his coming.

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

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

“Eureka” (J. Thomas)—Vol. 3, Part 2, Pages 532-605

“Thirteen Lectures on the Apocalypse” (R. Roberts)—Rev. 11 and 12

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

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

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *Show how the description of society in 2 Timothy 3:1-5 fits the twentieth century.*

2. *What is meant by the “drying up of the river Euphrates” in Rev. 16:12?*
3. *Explain how the Bible foretold that Jerusalem would be restored to the Jews.*
4. *List seven reasons (on seven lines) why Christ’s coming is at hand.*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *Give seven reasons which show that the coming of Christ is near at hand.*
2. *The Jewish presence in the Middle East is a remarkable fact of history. Explain why, in this century, they have returned to their land.*
3. *Russia has designs on the Middle East. Show how the Bible predicted this. What will be the outcome of these designs?*
4. *The signs of the times indicate that Christ’s coming is near. What does this mean to you personally?*