

The Acts of the Apostles

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(1991–1992 Study)

The following notes on The Acts of the Apostles were compiled from a Bible study led by Bro. Frank Shallieu in 1991–1992. They should be utilized with the following understanding:

1. Each paragraph preceded by **“Comment”** or **“Q”** (an abbreviation for **“Question”**) was introduced by someone other than Bro. Frank.
2. The original study did not follow a prepared text but was extemporaneous in nature.
3. Although the transcriber tried to faithfully, with the Lord’s help, set forth the thoughts that were presented in the study, the notes are not a verbatim rendering and, therefore, should be considered in that context.
4. Finally, Bro. Frank did not review the notes for possible errors that may have inadvertently entered the text.

With this disclaimer in mind, may the notes be a blessing as a useful study guide.

THE BOOK OF ACTS

(Study led by Bro. Frank Shallieu in 1991-1992)

Acts 1:1 The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach,

Luke recorded the Book of Acts and the Gospel of Luke, and in both cases, he was writing for the *Apostle Paul*. The beginning of each writing mentions Theophilus. "It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus" (Luke 1:3). Presumably Theophilus was a Christian, having given his heart and life to the Lord. A wealthy man, he wanted to help in the ministry, and feeling that Luke was talented, he decided to support him financially and no doubt in various other ways too, such as providing writing materials.

The term "former treatise" refers to the Gospel of Luke. Luke said he recorded in the Gospel "all that Jesus began both to do and teach," but the word "all" should be understood in a modified sense. To the best of his ability, Luke wrote "in order [sequence]" *all that the Holy Spirit helped him to recollect* personally and through Paul. Now Luke addressed the same individual, Theophilus, and acknowledged that he would write something in addition to the Gospel. He was saying in effect, "Now I would like to record the apostles' experiences subsequent to our Lord's ministry." The Book of Acts covers a period of about 35 years.

Comment: It is appropriate that Theophilus was memorialized in both books.

Reply: Sometimes a book is dedicated to a close and/or helpful individual, for example, "To my beloved wife." Luke was saying that without the assistance of Theophilus, he might not have gone ahead with the writing.

Acts 1:2 Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen:

Comment: Luke 24:51 (three verses from the end of the Gospel) harmonizes with this verse: "And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven."

Reply: Luke's Gospel covers events until the day Jesus ascended. He "*was ... carried up into heaven*" and "*was taken up*" in a cloud, thus being separated from them (Acts 1:9). Both narratives use passive voice. Luke appended the last part of his Gospel to the beginning of the Book of Acts.

Acts 1:3 To whom also he showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God:

Jesus' "passion" was his suffering and death on the Cross. After Jesus was resurrected, "he showed himself alive ... by many infallible proofs"; that is, he was seen on and off for 40 days by *multiple* witnesses. Paul knew about Jesus' life and background because he made special inquiry of Jesus' half brothers and of two apostles, Peter and James.

Acts 1:4 And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me.

Verse 4 refers to the Pentecostal blessing. Before Jesus was taken up from the Mount of Olives,

he instructed the apostles to wait in Jerusalem “for the promise of the Father,” that is, for the Holy Spirit. The Spirit descended on them ten days later. In other words, Jesus was with the apostles on and off for 40 days, and then they waited an additional ten days until Pentecost, the fiftieth day. It took *patience* to wait *ten days* in *one* location, and this was a test on the apostles.

Acts 1:5 For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.

With these words of Jesus, the apostles knew they would have at least a two-day wait.

Comment: Imagine the excitement! After two days, they would not want to leave even to get food for fear they would miss whatever would happen.

Acts 1:6 When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?

Whether they were eating together (see King James margin for verse 4) or at the mount, there was a little discussion, and the apostles asked, “Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?”

Comment: Jesus had already given his great prophecy of Matthew Chapter 24. The apostles’ question shows that they needed the Holy Spirit to understand the time feature.

Reply: They were probably somewhat numb with all that had happened. Indeed they had heard the sermon, so it had gone into their memory bank, but they would need the Holy Spirit of remembrance as a helper and an encouragement in his absence.

Acts 1:7 And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.

Jesus gave this answer to the apostles’ question about restoring the Kingdom to Israel. We are reminded of Matthew 24:36, “But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.” Mark added the detail that even the Son did not know at the time: “But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, *neither the Son, but the Father*” (Mark 13:32).

Comment: We are also reminded of the instruction to Daniel, “But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end” (Dan. 12:4).

Acts 1:8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

The Holy Spirit would empower them to be witnesses of Jesus in Jerusalem first, then in all Judea, next in Samaria, and finally in all the earth. Verse 8 shows not only the *progression* of the gospel message—starting at home base, as it were, then going to the surrounding area, proceeding on to the northern kingdom of Israel, and eventually going throughout the earth—but also the *responsibility* of the apostles.

Not until AD 36, which was 3 1/2 years later, did the gospel go to the Gentiles, starting with Cornelius. Based on the 70 weeks’ prophecy of Daniel, Jesus was cut off in the midst of the last week, leaving 3 1/2 years in which Israel’s most holy element would be anointed; that is, the most reverent and those most hungry for truth would be given a special unction of the Holy Spirit with gifts like the ones the apostles would shortly receive at Pentecost. The Holy Spirit

would also enlighten the disciples as to the meaning of the 70 weeks' prophecy of Daniel, among other things.

Acts 1:9 And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.

We are reminded of Elijah's being taken up in the whirlwind (2 Kings 2:1).

Comment: The wording "a cloud received him out of their sight" sounds as if a cloud was specially prepared for this occasion.

Acts 1:10 And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel;

Acts 1:11 Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? 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.

Verses 10 and 11 remind us of the two angels at the tomb following Jesus' resurrection (Luke 24:4). The similarity makes us wonder if these two beings, who looked like men in white apparel and were giving instruction, were the same two angels. They were saying in effect, "Why are you standing here gazing up into heaven? You have something to do. Jesus will come again in like manner as you have seen him go."

Comment: The Harvest message helps us to realize what coming "in like manner" means. As the apostles, *his followers*, saw Jesus go, so sincere Christians with present truth, not the world, perceive his return at the Second Advent.

Reply: The emphasis is on the word "ye." "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." Jesus would come at the Second Advent in such a manner that only the brotherhood would be aware of his return. Just as he *privately* took them to the Mount of Olives and instructed them personally—with only believers present—so it would be when he came again. Based on other Scriptures, we know he would not be seen literally.

Comment: Mark 16:14,19 tells that at least the eleven apostles (and perhaps a few others) were present. Also, the fact that Jesus went *quietly* up into heaven without commotion or show was a clue as to how he would return.

Reply: That is true. However, the main point here is that the *apostles* saw him go, not the world. It was a *private* audience. Those who saw Jesus ascend were a *small* number, and they were all *specially chosen* for the occasion. The implication is that Jesus would inform his followers when he returned at his Second Advent. Of course the disciples did not fully understand his words at this time.

The Apostle Paul gave Luke the information to record. With diligence and persistence, Paul sought accurate information about the Lord's life from others who were present when he was not. There is a similarity to Jesus' asking questions of the priests when he was a young boy only 12 years of age. His questions revealed the depth of his knowledge. Paul not only went into the wilderness for a while but also wanted to begin his ministry with as much understanding as possible—and then he went like a fireball.

In connection with the apostles' ministry, it was very important for them to see Jesus ascend into heaven, for later they would be dispersed. For example, Mark traveled down to Egypt,

and Thomas went toward India. Although they may have had companions, the apostles no longer went two by two with each other.

Acts 1:12 Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey.

A "sabbath day's journey" was about two miles. Travel could only be on foot and for this limited distance, which was reasonable for going to a synagogue or a house to observe a feast or the sabbath (see John 11:18).

Acts 1:13 And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James.

Acts 1:14 These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.

The small number of brethren listed here would have fit in the "upper room," which could have been the same room that was used to institute the Memorial. Those present were the eleven apostles; women; Mary, Jesus' mother; and his brothers, Joses and Simon. One reason the women were there is that meals had to be served, and it was logical for Mary to be present because she was with John.

Earlier Joses and Simon did not believe Jesus was the Messiah, but now they believed. Various factors would have convinced them: the raising of Lazarus, Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem, and Jesus' resurrection.

For the ten days of waiting, harmony and closeness and oneness of purpose in prayer characterized their association, for the brethren "all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication." This statement proves that Jesus' two brothers had now accepted him and consecrated.

Acts 1:15 And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty,)

"And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples." Which "days"? Luke was writing this account many years later and describing conditions that existed during Jesus' life and ministry and how he ascended on high in a cloud. Now he was referring to "those days," that is, "at that time back there." Acts 2:14 tells us that Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost, so his standing up and speaking here in verse 15 had to be on the same day. (Surely Peter did not stand up and speak during the ten days that the disciples were praying and waiting for the Holy Spirit.) When the Holy Spirit came, the disciples were energized, and then Peter preached.

Comment: In this setting, Matthias was selected by lots, and surely the apostles did not do the selecting during the ten days they were praying and waiting for the Holy Spirit to come.

Reply: Luke was writing about something that had happened 30 or more years previous. He was saying, "Back there in those days, when these things occurred, Peter stood up and gave a sermon on the Day of Pentecost." Earlier that same day, the disciples received the Holy Spirit.

Q: Could we say that verses 15 to 26 (the end of the chapter) were a parenthetical insert? The main narrative would then go from verse 14 to the first verse of Chapter 2.

A: Yes. Many writers and historians have used this technique.

Acts 1:16 Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus.

The Apostle Peter would have quoted Psalm 41:9, a prophecy that Judas would betray Jesus. “Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me.” Judas acted as a “guide” in leading the apprehenders to the Garden of Gethsemane, where he identified Jesus with a kiss.

Comment: It is interesting that the same Greek word *hetairos* is translated “friend” only three times in the Gospels, and each time it is used in connection with either a Second Death class or Judas (Matt. 20:13; 22:12; 26:50).

Acts 1:17 For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry.

Judas “was numbered with us”; that is, he was one of the twelve apostles.

Comment: How sad it is that Judas threw away one of the twelve highest positions in the Kingdom—in fact, the *highest* position, for Paul took his place!

Acts 1:18 Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out.

Judas “purchased a field with the reward of iniquity”; that is, he returned the betrayal money, and the money was used to purchase a field that was called “potter’s field” because potters got their clay there (Matt. 27:10). Judas hung himself in that area. The branch probably broke, and “falling headlong” into the valley or field below, “he burst asunder in the midst” with the result that “all his bowels gushed out.” What a *gruesome* and *notorious* death—but fitting for the betrayer of Jesus! The horrible sight of his bowels gushing out *vividly portrayed* the Second Death fate of Judas.

Acts 1:19 And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem; insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, Aceldama, that is to say, The field of blood.

It was well known that Judas’s suicide had occurred there and that his bowels had gushed out. Because of this awareness, the field was called “The field of blood.” In other words, *later*, after the returned money was used to purchase the field, the people associated the money, Judas, the betrayal, and the suicide.

Acts 1:20 For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his bishopric let another take.

“Let his [Judas’s] habitation be desolate” is a quote from Psalm 69:25. The thought of “desolate” is that he would have no posterity and would go into Second Death. One who is raised from the tomb has a “habitation,” so Judas will not be raised. The multiple Scriptures about Judas, taken as a whole, clearly show he went into Second Death.

The actual Psalm 69:25 context discusses the Second Death element (*plural*), whereas here in the Book of Acts, Peter took the principle and applied it *singularly* to Judas. “Let their habitation be desolate; and let none dwell in their tents.... Add iniquity unto their iniquity: and let them not come into thy righteousness. Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous” (Psa. 69:25,27,28).

Hebrews 10:27 says there awaits the Second Death class of the Gospel Age “a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation,” yet many who go into Second Death have no fear because their conscience is so seared. Therefore, the context is stating the situation from the standpoint of the *beholder*. For example, we are horrified to read about Judas. The *onlooker* realizes the terrible thing that has happened, especially if he has known and associated with the Second Death person.

“His bishopric let another take.” Based on this text, the apostles felt justified in filling the vacancy left by Judas.

Acts 1:21 Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us,

Acts 1:22 Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.

The eleven knew there should be twelve apostles, so they thought it would be appropriate for them to select the twelfth through prayer and lots. They reasoned that the twelfth had to be (1) a holy man, (2) one who had been on hand ever since John’s baptism of Jesus (and thus was familiar with Jesus), and (3) a witness of his resurrection. In other words, the one selected had to be on hand from the early days of Jesus’ ministry to the concluding days of his ministry. Their reasoning sounded good, but the Lord’s reasoning was higher.

Acts 1:23 And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias.

Acts 1:24 And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, show whether of these two thou hast chosen,

Acts 1:25 That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.

Acts 1:26 And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

Comment: The eleven thought the selection of Matthias by lots was the answer to prayer.

Reply: The apostles honestly thought this was the best way to proceed under the circumstances, but Matthias was *their* selection—they had cast the lots. The Lord did not reprimand them but simply ignored their choice.

The lot had to fall on one of the two, and it fell upon Matthias. This incident shows that the collective judgment of the brotherhood is not necessarily correct. Later, brethren laid their hands on Paul as if he were *their* representative and as if *they* were involved in his selection, but Paul was *God’s* choice through Jesus. Some brethren thought Paul should have certain constraints, but he was an apostle of *Jesus Christ* and not of men.

If we put ourselves in the place of Matthias, we can appreciate more fully his experience. A while after his selection, along came Paul saying that he was the twelfth apostle and that he had been appointed by God. This announcement could have been quite a trial for Matthias. We wonder if he was hurt by this experience.

Acts 2:1 And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

The expression “when the day of Pentecost was *fully* come” shows the importance of the date. Similar examples are that Jesus was born “when the fulness of the time was come” and crucified when “his hour was come” (Gal. 4:4; John 13:1). Therefore, the Holy Spirit could not come until the Day of Pentecost arrived. “They were all with one accord in one place [in an upper room of a house]” (Acts 1:13; 2:2).

Acts 2:2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.

The *sound* of a mighty wind filled the house. The thought is not that objects were blowing around the room but that the apostles and the others *heard* the roar of a *violent* wind. The wind was no doubt so violent that it shook the house as on another occasion (see Acts 4:31).

Why did the sound come *suddenly*? Why did the wind represent the Holy Spirit? Like the wind, the Holy Spirit is a *powerful, invisible force*. Since wind normally increases gradually, the suddenness had the psychological effect of showing that the sound was not a natural occurrence. Also, the suddenness of the sound would have startled the apostles and the others into attention. Having been in “one accord,” they may even have been praying, but whatever they were doing, they would have stopped and hearkened (Acts 1:14).

The *sound* of a violent wind (but not the wind itself) “filled all the house” like a *powerful presence*. The “sound ... of a rushing mighty wind” means a *continuing* roar, not one blast. All in the room received the Holy Spirit and a tongue of fire. This incident marked the introduction of the Holy Spirit in the sense of doing extraordinary things in a marked, miraculous fashion in the early Church.

Q: Would Matthias have been present with the apostles?

A: Yes. Presumably he was not only with the apostles but considered one of them until Paul came on the scene.

Q: Would Matthias also have received a tongue of fire?

A: It would seem so because even ordinary believers in the early Church got a gift of the Holy Spirit as an evidence of their acceptance.

Acts 2:3 And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.

In addition to the sound of wind, a tongue of fire (a flame in the shape of a fiery tongue) rested on the head of each one in the room. A luminous body of fire was above, and to each person assembled, a flame came out in the shape of a tongue; that is, the terminal end that rested on the head of each person was in the shape of a tongue. The “tongues ... of fire” indicated that there would be some evidence of *power* and *illumination* in their future speech. The disciples were probably sitting when they *heard* the sound of a mighty rushing wind right in the room. As they were paralyzed from the sound, they *saw* cloven tongues of fire on the heads of those assembled. The fact that the tongues were “cloven” means they were separated from a main source above, and a connection or distribution of fire singled out each one in the room.

The *same* Holy Spirit has diverse operations. Subsequently in the early Church, the gift of the Holy Spirit came by a laying on of hands (usually by one of the apostles) instead of a tongue of fire. The variety of gifts, listed in 1 Corinthians 12:8-11, included the sudden miraculous impartation of speaking in a tongue (another language), interpreting tongues (other

languages), prophesying, and having a remarkable memory of Scripture with the ability to quote at length. With each of the Spirit-begotten brethren having at least one gift and thus contributing something to the whole, the brethren got a powerful lesson of how they needed one another for Bible study and edification. This evidence of the communal need for fellowship may have been one reason the disciples divided their properties later on, although, in time, experience proved that living in communes was inadvisable and impractical (Acts 4:34–5:11).

Why was fire so appropriate as a symbol? Fire was visible, and it represented illumination, energy, activity, and zeal. At one time, the Prophet Jeremiah was so depressed about the lack of attention being paid to the words the Lord had given him to speak that he thought, “Maybe I should refrain from speaking.” However, he could not contain himself because the Lord’s Word was in his bones like a consuming fire. The words kept building up and building up until they came out like a fire (Jer. 20:7-9). At the First Advent, Jesus said, “The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up [consumed me]” (John 2:17).

Comment: Two Scriptures come to mind. “Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts” (Zech. 4:6). “Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might” (Eph. 6:10). Any power, or might, that is here on the earth is pale by comparison with the power of the Holy Spirit. Fire is a good symbol of the effectiveness of that power.

Acts 2:4 And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

All who were present received a fiery “tongue,” the ability to speak a foreign language, but they did not all receive the same language. As a minimum, each of the disciples could now speak at least two languages, the previous language and a new (gift) language.

Acts 2:5 And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven.

Jews gathered in Jerusalem to worship at the Temple on the Day of Pentecost (and for Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles). Those who came from a great distance surely did not go to the Temple on the very day of their arrival. For example, if the service began early in the morning, they would have to arrive the day before or the week before. And sometimes they stayed the week after the service, especially if they had made a long trip from a far country and wanted time to get acquainted with other Jews. Therefore, the “dwelling” of “devout men” at Jerusalem from “every nation under heaven” was mostly of a temporary nature—a sojourning, as it were, for an occasion. Some of the Jews came for Passover and then remained in the Jerusalem area for the 50 days until Pentecost. A 50-day stay would certainly be considered “dwelling” there.

These were “devout men” because the trip to Jerusalem was long and expensive and entailed sacrifice, sometimes requiring them to be away from their families for months. They could not travel from a distance every year and yet support a family, but they did the best they could under the circumstance.

Acts 2:6 Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language.

The speaking in tongues for witnessing purposes occurred in the environs of Jerusalem at this Pentecostal season. Each one in the audience recognized his own language being spoken. With 1 to 2 million people coming for a feast, it was natural for families, friends, and all those of a certain race or language to lodge together. There were not enough rooms, so many slept outdoors and in tents, such as on the Mount of Olives, and gathered according to language and

background for closer fellowship. As word spread about the apostles' speaking in different languages, a larger group gathered to hear.

Acts 2:7 And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans?

Acts 2:8 And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?

Basically speaking, the apostles were all Galileans, as revealed by their speech or accent in ordinary conversation. Therefore, the multitude were amazed to be able to "hear ... every man in our own tongue."

Acts 2:9 Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia,

Acts 2:10 Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes,

Acts 2:11 Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.

Acts 2:12 And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this?

Acts 2:13 Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine.

As all of the apostles (and some others too) were speaking in tongues, little groups formed around each of the brethren according to the language spoken. Thus multiple sermons on the truth were being preached simultaneously to various Jews from various places. The local residents of Judea also attended, but the Jews who gathered to hear were mostly from other lands.

Some of the hearers began to mock, accusing the apostles of being drunk. These mocking Jews were probably from Judea, that is, indigenous Israelites. Because they could not understand the foreign languages, they considered the different tongues to be babbling. But the Jews from other countries who heard the preaching in their own tongue were very attentive, and they marveled.

The Parthians, Medes, and Elamites were mostly from Asia Minor to the north and west. Cappadocia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia were also in Asia Minor (Turkey today). Jews came from all of the 15 or so places that are mentioned. With a tongue being spoken for each of the nationalities, the suggestion is that more than just the apostles spoke in tongues.

Those who spoke in tongues to the multitude were probably all men, but the Holy Spirit rested on women too on the Day of Pentecost. All who consecrated in the early Church received a gift. In fact, if one did not get a gift back there, it was questionable whether the consecration was sincere. For example, when a man named Simon tried to buy the Holy Spirit in his insincerity, his request was denied (Acts 8:18-23).

We will digress a little and discuss certain aspects of speaking in tongues, as presented in Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians. "For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries" (1 Cor. 14:2). The one who spoke in a tongue frequently understood the tongue and could communicate with God, but that type of communication was only *self*-edification

between God and him. Paul said it was more important to edify *others*, and in edifying others, the individual also edified himself. But it was even more important to *teach* and to prophesy than to speak in a tongue (1 Cor. 14:1,3,4). Why? Because teaching implies a *deeper understanding*.

“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal” (1 Cor. 13:1). The expression “tongues ... of angels” means that literal angels have a literal language. It is probably the same language that was spoken by all people on earth prior to the confusion of tongues at the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:6,7). Therefore, based on this Scripture, a person in the early Church might have the ability to speak the language “of angels,” which nobody down here could understand. A person was to keep quiet if no one in the congregation could understand or interpret the language being spoken (1 Cor. 14:28).

Since Paul could speak in multiple tongues, he visited many countries. He characteristically went first to the synagogue in a new area and then spoke to the Gentiles in their own tongue. Tongues were a gift used to convince *nonbelievers* and to witness to them in their *own* language (1 Cor. 14:22).

Comment: If one spoke a language no one but God could interpret, then that tongue was to be spoken only to God in prayer.

If a foreign language was spoken to, say, three or four individuals out of a group of 15, an interpreter would then translate the message so that the rest would understand and benefit. Prophesying was the ability to take that which was translated and expound on its significance, correlating it to other Scriptures.

Because of the gifts, each one in an ecclesia in the early Church felt like an essential part of the whole. These encouraging experiences offset the persecutions and helped the brethren to maintain their faith.

Some apply what happened in the early Church to present-day conditions in an attempt to rationalize speaking that no one can understand. Sometimes tongues are genuine, sometimes they are fraudulent through pride or simulation, and sometimes they come through the Adversary. Tongues are not the method the Lord uses today.

Paul likened speaking in tongues to a child with a toy (1 Cor. 13:8-11). To deal with a child, we have to come down to the intellect of that youngster and use a rattle, a drum, baby talk, etc. As the child grows and matures, we can use more intelligence. Paul did not say that tongues had no validity, but he said that the Christian should *go on to higher things*.

Comment: The purpose is, and always has been, *to edify*. If one person out of a whole congregation needed a message, there would be no need to confuse the entire congregation. God is not the author of confusion.

Reply: Tongues are used as an excuse today and are not valid. If we had a message for another person, we would single out that individual privately.

Comment: It would be frightening to be speaking and not know what we were saying.

Reply: Sometimes a message is true even though it comes from a fallen spirit. The spirit singles out an individual and capitalizes on the situation, using a spectacular method for a purpose that can be very misleading. An individual who feeds on such messages is not edified anymore than a baby matures with a rattle.

Comment: The following Scriptures are good regarding the place of tongues in the early Church: “I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all: Yet in the church *I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue.* Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men.... Wherefore *tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe*” (1 Cor. 14:18-20,22).

Reply: One duty of an elder in those days was to see that as many as possible were edified and to stop someone from speaking in a tongue that no one could understand. The gifts came almost invariably by the laying on of hands of the apostles, but there were exceptions. For example, Paul got his gifts from Ananias, who was not an apostle. He said he would rather speak five meaningful words that were edifying than 10,000 words that were not.

Acts 2:14 But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words:

Acts 2:15 For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day.

Acts 2:16 But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel;

Acts 2:17 And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams:

Acts 2:18 And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy:

Acts 2:19 And I will show wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke:

Acts 2:20 The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come:

Acts 2:21 And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Let us assume that the mockers were Judeans who did not understand the foreign languages being spoken and felt the words were gibberish. When Peter overheard their snide remarks on the sideline, he was bestirred to speak out strongly to the native residents of Judea. He wanted to put the mockers in their place, and he started by saying the apostles were not drunk. One reason they were not drunk was that it was “but the third hour [9 a.m.] of the day.” This statement helps us to calculate time in the Book of Acts. For example, the sixth hour would be 12 noon. Although Peter was particularly addressing the Judean Jews on this issue, his sermon subsequently embraced all Israelites: “Ye men of Israel....” (Acts 2:22).

Next Peter quoted from Joel 2:28-32, paraphrasing to some extent, as was the custom, because there were no chapters or verses in the Old Testament. Peter was saying, “Joel spoke about what you are now seeing and experiencing. God said He would pour out His Spirit upon all flesh.” The “all flesh” in this context would be the Medes, Parthians, Cappadocians, Elamites, etc. (Acts 2:9-11). In other words, Peter was saying, “There is universal representation here with Jews of all nations, as it were, coming to this feast and receiving a dispensation of grace in

their own tongues.” (Paul also used this technique of giving a localized application to a text with a broader primary meaning yet to be fulfilled.)

Peter gave a *strong* message, but his application of Joel 2:28-32 was only a *partial* fulfillment. The primary fulfillment is still future, at the end of the age (“in the last days”). Just as the French Revolution was a mini-picture of things to come, so the application of Joel in Peter’s day was a mini-representation of what will occur in the future. Although we usually give a Gospel Age application to the phrase “in those days” in verse 18, it also has a future application. We usually apply this text to the Gospel Age Church, but that fulfillment is buried in the whole just like the prophecies of Babylon in Jeremiah Chapters 50 and 51, where some verses have already been fulfilled, some are yet future, and some have double fulfillments. The point is that the pouring out of the Holy Spirit in the Kingdom will not be exclusive to the Jews. In time, the Holy Spirit will be poured out *universally* on a broad segment of the populace regardless of nationality, race, sex, or age. Young men will see visions, old men will dream dreams, and sons and daughters (children) will prophesy, sing songs, and have the spirit of happiness and joy.

“I will show wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath.” Peter was referring to the supernatural signs in nature at the time of the Crucifixion, which were again a partial fulfillment of the Joel text. An earthquake occurred, and the resulting debris cloud darkened the sun from noon until 3 p.m.—midday! One proof that there was an earthquake is the rending of the Temple veil—something that had never happened before. Peter was pointing out to all, the signs that had occurred in that *one* day. (Incidentally, there was no eclipse at that time, contrary to what many think.) Although the fulfillment at the First Advent was very important, the Prophet Joel was speaking primarily of the end of the present age, as can be seen by actually studying the Book of Joel and seeing the breadth of the description.

As Peter applied verse 19, the expression “vapour of smoke” referred to the dark dust cloud from the earthquake that obscured the sunlight at the time of the Crucifixion. “The moon [being turned] into blood” means that the dust particles reddened the moon—a phenomenon that is sometimes very beautiful. The word “blood” may even refer to deaths that occurred in connection with the earthquake.

Q: Would those who heard Peter’s sermon and then lived for several decades have thought that the trouble of AD 69-70 was “that great and notable day of the Lord”?

A: Yes, and signs will *precede* the great day of the Lord yet future.

Comment: First, the listening Jews were startled to hear their own tongues being spoken by Galileans. Then Peter thundered on the prophecy from Joel. Next Peter said, “Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (verse 21). The subsequent words about Jesus would have had a powerful emotional effect on those whose hearts were right (see verses 22 and 23). Their consciences were affected.

Reply: Peter was using his tongue *of fire*. Verse 21 was the preface for the powerful conviction that he impressed upon the listeners in the next two verses. We should keep in mind, however, that the *primary* application is still future in regard to the Holy Remnant, who will be enjoined to “call on the name of the Lord ... [and thus] be saved.”

Acts 2:22 Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know:

Now Peter began to address all in attendance including the sojourning Jews from foreign lands: “Ye men of Israel...” He pricked the consciences of devout Jews regarding the Crucifixion

whether or not they lived in Israel proper.

Comment: This verse would be meaningless with the Trinity doctrine. God did miracles “by” or *through* the man Jesus. God did not do the miracles through Himself.

Acts 2:23 Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:

When Jews from other places arrived for Pentecost, some heard for the first time what had happened 50 days previous. They heard contradictory reports, some favorable and some unfavorable, but now they were hearing the truth. “Men of Israel, ye have taken Jesus and crucified him by wicked hands” is the main thought of verses 22 and 23.

Q: Does the term “determinate counsel” refer to God’s predetermined plan?

A: The term reinforces God’s foreknowledge and indicates there was a *purpose* to the Crucifixion, namely, to save others through Jesus’ blood. The Crucifixion was *necessary*. Not only did Jesus acquiesce and allow himself to be taken, but even more emphatic, *he came for that very purpose*. God had a *predetermined plan* that Jesus should die. Jesus said, “Truly the Son of man goeth, as it was [*pre*]determined: but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed!” (Luke 22:22). It was predetermined that Messiah would be a “man of sorrows” and that the curse would be upon him (Isa. 53:3). He had to die in order to provide a basis for salvation of both Jew and Gentile.

In God’s “counsel,” in His *plan*, it was necessary for Jesus to come to earth and die. All of the events in connection with the Crucifixion were predetermined and foreknown by God. Foreknowledge is the ability to *see* something before it happens. To predetermine means to *plan* that something will happen. It was predetermined that Jesus would be numbered among the transgressors, for example (Isa. 53:12). In the *Diaglott*, “determinate counsel” is called a “fixed purpose.”

Acts 2:24 Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.

In one sense, *God* raised Jesus out of death. In another sense, *Jesus* burst asunder the bonds of death.

Acts 2:25 For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved:

Acts 2:26 Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope:

Acts 2:27 Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.

Acts 2:28 Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance.

In verses 25-28, the Apostle Peter quoted from Psalm 16, where David was prophetically speaking for Jesus. “I [Jesus] have set the LORD [Jehovah] always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.... For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell [Hebrew *sheol*]; neither wilt thou suffer [the flesh of] thine Holy One to see corruption [to corrupt in the normal fashion]” (Psa. 16:8,10). In Acts 2:27, the Greek word *hades* is used for “hell.” Hence Acts 2:27 is

a proof text that *hades* and *sheol* are the same.

Stench usually accompanies the decaying process but not in Jesus' case. Jesus' flesh was not left to corrupt and decay, for it was miraculously extracted from the burial wrappings and dissolved into gases. "Linen clothes" had been wrapped *continuously* around the various members of Jesus' body, and when John saw the grave clothes still *in position but as a collapsed cocoon*, he *believed* Jesus had risen (John 20:6-8).

Q: Since Jesus is at the Father's right hand of power, why does Psalm 16:8 (and Acts 2:25) say the Father is at *Jesus' right hand*?

A: There are two possibilities: (1) Acts 2:25 (Psa. 16:8) refers to Jesus' position as the Father's mouthpiece *prior to glorification*. When glorified, Jesus will be exalted not just as the Father's mouthpiece but as the Father's dear Son and honored agent in future works. (2) The Father was Jesus' *bosom benefactor, his closest friend*. The two verses in question do not refer to the *throne* (as in Hebrews 1:3; 8:1; 12:2; and 1 Peter 3:22) but are stated from a *fellowship* standpoint. The earlier emphasis with the Logos was different—he and his Father were closest companions. The right hand is considered a position of favor. In regard to the *throne of authority*, Jesus is seated on the right hand of God's power. Jehovah, being on the left in this circumstance, has the primacy. The position to the Father's right is next in honor, command, and authority.

Acts 2:29 Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day.

Acts 2:30 Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne;

Acts 2:31 He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption.

Peter was saying that David is still in the tomb and that David's son would be his Lord. "Of the fruit of his [David's] loins" would come forth Messiah, who would be raised to sit on a heavenly throne.

Acts 2:32 This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses.

Acts 2:33 Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.

Acts 2:34 For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand,

Acts 2:35 Until I make thy foes thy footstool.

Acts 2:36 Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.

Notice that Peter's words were strong: "Let *all* the house of Israel know *assuredly*, that ... ye have crucified" Jesus. Notice also the emphasis on the Father. *God* raised Jesus. *God* exalted Jesus. *God* gave Jesus the Holy Spirit. *God* made Jesus to be Lord and Christ. Trinitarians cannot explain verses 32, 33, and 36.

Jehovah said to Jesus (paraphrased), “Sit on my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.” In the Old Testament as well as here in verse 34, the translators differentiated between “LORD” and “Lord.” Trinitarians do not explain this difference.

Peter said to the Jews who were listening, “Jesus shed forth the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, which you now see and hear in our [the apostles’] ability to speak in tongues” (paraphrase). Again Peter stated that David is not in heaven (verses 29 and 34).

Acts 2:37 Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?

Peter’s sermon in verses 14-36 had to be delivered with *power and emphasis* for so many to be “pricked [or pierced] in their heart” about the Crucifixion of Jesus. Peter’s words brought conviction, and in bringing conviction to a hazy subject, Peter had to be assisted by the Holy Spirit in annunciation, volume, proper emphasis, etc., for this was a new subject.

Q: At the end of this age, the Father will open the eyes of understanding of the Holy Remnant by His Spirit. Was the Holy Spirit also a factor back there at Pentecost? Since God can read the heart, would He have given individual help to understand? Most of those present were hearing these truths for the first time, so did God assist them so that the words would penetrate and a sizable nucleus would accept Christ at that point? In other words, was there an assist for the hearers as well as for Peter, who gave the sermon?

A: Yes, some providence was exercised in advance to make sure the right-hearted ones were present. They were individually guided to that spot so that there would be an almost unanimous reaction with “three thousand souls” accepting Christ (Acts 2:41). Then, too, most of these Jews were a “devout” element who had come from a distance at personal sacrifice.

Of the listening Jews from Israel, only a limited number would have been present at Jesus’ trial, so others must have beheld him on the Cross and been momentarily swayed by the circumstances that made Jesus look like a sinner. He was crucified on a cross, and the Scriptures say, “Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree” (Deut. 21:22,23; Gal. 3:13). Of course they did not know that Jesus had to be considered a curse in order to have the penalty of Adam’s sin laid upon him and thus to take Adam’s place as the sinner. The Jews assumed that if God’s providence allowed Jesus to be crucified, then God must have approved of the guilty verdict. Jesus had claimed to be the Son of God, but his crucifixion made him appear as a false Messiah. The Jews did not know the philosophy of the Ransom; they did not know that the perfect and innocent Jesus had to be a corresponding price for Adam. The reaction of the Jews at the time was understandable, but now that the Scriptures were being explained, they were repentant. After all, even the apostles, who had been properly instructed for 3 1/2 years were momentarily taken aback by the Crucifixion, so it is no wonder the other Jews reacted thus (Isa. 53:3). Those whose consciences were properly affected asked, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?”

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

Peter instructed them, “Repent, and be baptized ... in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Bible Students generally misunderstand this verse. The command was to *repent* and be baptized. The Pastor felt that Jews who consecrated could be transferred into Christ because they had already received John’s baptism, but Peter was urging baptism *into Christ*.

Comment: Based on the Harvest message, some reason that the Jew, up until the time of the

conversion of Cornelius, needed only John's baptism. And they say that Acts 2:38 refers to John's baptism because it mentions the remission of sins, but this verse very clearly says "in the name of *Jesus Christ*."

Reply: Both Jew and Gentile needed to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins in order to receive the Holy Spirit. The Jew did not just go from the Law to the Grace Covenant without repentance and remorse.

All who received the Holy Spirit got at least one gift. The eleven apostles were all on hand to help in baptizing the 3,000 (verse 41). The account does not say whether the apostles laid hands on each of the 3,000. However, the apostles' hands had to touch the convert to immerse him in water, so this occasion was not an exception to the usual procedure.

Acts 2:39 For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.

Peter's saying "the Lord *our* God" shows he was addressing fellow Jews. Another proof of a Jewish audience is the statement "unto you, and to your children." "And to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" applies to Jews from other countries but also makes allowance for Gentiles later.

Acts 2:40 And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.

Acts 2:41 Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.

Peter exhorted the Jews who were present, "Save yourselves from this untoward [crooked] generation." Then "they that gladly received his word were baptized." Not all who heard the sermon were baptized, but probably the great majority were in order to result in 3,000. Among those who were providentially guided to hear the sermon, there could have been compatriots who simply accompanied them as family members.

Comment: The sermon started at 9 a.m. in the morning. We do not know how "many other words" Peter spoke, but with 3,000 being baptized in one day, it is good the sermon started early in the morning. How beautiful to behold 3,000 being baptized on one occasion!

Comment: Imagine being part of the group of 3,000 whose hearts were pricked! The group emotionalism would have been very moving. And what a joy to Peter, who had denied the Lord not long before, to be the instrument of such blessing here!

Reply: Many of these Jews had come from a distance. They were a "devout" element, who sacrificed to go to Jerusalem (Acts 2:5).

The baptism would have been total immersion. It could have taken place in the Pool of Siloam or the Pool of Bethesda, which was a little larger.

Acts 2:42 And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

Acts 2:43 And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.

The 3,000 "continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of

bread, and in prayers.” What a wonderful introduction into the body of Christ, and what a change, for prior to this incident, there were relatively few disciples! Holy reverence “came upon every soul.”

Comment: The *beginning* of the Gospel Age started with a miraculous group conversion, and the *beginning* of the Kingdom Age will likewise start with a miraculous group conversion, this time with the Holy Remnant. *Both* miraculous group conversions are with *Jews*.

Reply: Although only a small percentage of all Jews, the Holy Remnant will be a significant number of individuals. Most Israelites will die in the Time of Trouble at the end of this age, but they will come forth from the tomb very early and receive correctional judgment.

Acts 2:44 And all that believed were together, and had all things common;

Acts 2:45 And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.

Acts 2:46 And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,

Acts 2:47 Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

With their “gladness and singleness of heart,” we can see their holy joy. To meet their natural needs, the brethren sold their possessions and put the results in a common pot for distribution as needed. Thus communal living prevailed in the early Church, but in time, it proved to be impractical.

There were 500 brethren in addition to the 3,000 (1 Cor. 15:6). “Breaking bread from house to house” implies that the local Christian Jews made their homes available for eating. The first part of verse 46 describes the *spiritual* gathering together: “And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple.” The rest of the verse describes how their *temporal* needs were taken care of. Communal eating was necessary because the brethren had sold their possessions, but of course the large group had to be split up.

Comment: Their food must have been simple (bread and fish?) so that they had as much time as possible for the spiritual.

Notice that they had “favour with all the people” (verse 47). The 3,000 new Christian converts were so joyous and wonderfully moved that their joy was contagious to those who beheld them, at least temporarily, until the preaching began.

“The Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.” Selection was going on. God’s providence was steering people so that they would get the message and be able to consecrate intelligently.

Acts 3:1 Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour.

The ninth hour was 3 p.m., for time was reckoned from 6 a.m.

Acts 3:2 And a certain man lame from his mother’s womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple;

The setting for the miracle that was about to take place was dramatic. A man lame from birth was *carried* daily and laid at the gate of the Temple called Beautiful to beg for alms of those going into the Temple. The man had to be very crippled to require carrying. The term “from his mother’s womb” means from birth, from the moment the fetus came forth from the womb.

The gate Beautiful was not only the east gate, but it was the most ornamented gate. Jesus gave his “I am the vine” sermon in that vicinity (John 15:1-6).

Acts 3:3 Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms.

Acts 3:4 And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us.

When the lame man asked alms of Peter and John, Peter said, “Look on *us*.” Why did Peter include John? Peter was the spokesman, but it is commendable that he humbly shared the honor of healing with John and considered them both equals as brethren. Since Paul had not joined them yet, Peter and John were the two leading apostles, and they just naturally gravitated together. They had strong but different personalities with a close kinship.

Acts 3:5 And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them.

The lame man looked on Peter and John, expecting that they would give him alms.

Acts 3:6 Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.

But instead of giving alms, Peter spoke with *power*: “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.” Why did Peter mention Nazareth? Nazareth was considered inferior, and Peter was saying in effect, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth—*that one*—to rise up and walk.” The *common* people appreciated that Jesus came from Nazareth. Also, Peter wanted to make clear that the credit for healing should go to Jesus, not to John and him.

Peter did not have much money on him: “Silver and gold have I none [that is, he had no excess money].” However, healing was one of Peter’s gifts. All of the early Christians got at least one gift, and the apostles were given multiple gifts. Of course Paul later had more gifts than any of the other apostles.

Acts 3:7 And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.

Peter took the lame man’s right hand and assisted him to his feet. The man certainly did not expect a miracle after *years* of lameness and weakness, but *immediately* as Peter lifted him up, the lame man’s knees, feet, and ankle bones were strengthened so that he could walk. He probably felt an electricity go through him.

Q: When the apostles healed, did they lose strength like Jesus?

A: The Bible does not say. They may have lost some strength but not like our Lord.

Acts 3:8 And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God.

The man *leaped up*, stood, and walked with them into the Temple. He kept praising God and

walking and leaping to test his new-found limbs and also to express his great joy.

Comment: We are reminded of a Scripture that applies to the Kingdom: “*Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert*” (Isa. 35:6).

Acts 3:9 And all the people saw him walking and praising God:

Acts 3:10 And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him.

The people who recognized the formerly lame man were amazed at his healing. They, too, praised God.

Acts 3:11 And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon’s, greatly wondering.

In gratitude, the now-healed man held Peter and John. Meanwhile, those who had seen the miracle *ran excitedly* to tell others. Word of the healing spread rapidly, and many people gathered quickly unto Peter, John, and the cured man in Solomon’s Porch, which was a cloistered portico or hall.

Acts 3:12 And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?

Acts 3:13 The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go.

Acts 3:14 But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you;

Peter used the healing of the lame man as the basis for a witness, and he started by showing emphatically that *God* should get the credit for the healing, which was done *through Jesus*. Incidentally, the word “answered” in the Old English means “mentioned” or “made a statement” and not necessarily that one responded to a question.

Notice Peter’s *strong* statements about what had been done to Jesus: “Whom ye delivered up, and denied.... But ye denied the Holy One ... and desired a murderer to be granted unto you.” People today generally feel that the Christian should always be gentle, but many have come into the truth when they realized Papacy was the Antichrist. They were so shocked when that veil was broken that they responded very dramatically. To speak calmly and gently does not always produce the desired results. Peter did not just witness—he *rebuked* the people!

It was still the Pentecostal season, and many were visiting Israel from foreign lands at this time. They had come by foot, cart, mule, and boat—some from as far away as 1,000 miles—at the cost of time and expense to be in Jerusalem for Passover. Once there, they remained through the Pentecostal season (seven weeks). Thus these Jews were there when Jesus died, and they had seen the Cross on the brow of Golgotha’s skull or hill—on high stage in front of the nation! Peter pinpointed their responsibility in the Crucifixion with a penetrating sermon: “Whom *YE* delivered up, and denied” by repeatedly shouting, “Crucify him!” when Pilate “was determined to let him [Jesus] go.” Finally Pilate conceded to the demands, being fearful for his office. Three years later he lost his office anyway—as retribution.

If we study Peter's sermons, we will see that they were *very forceful*. Not only did he convict the hearers of their wrong by placing the onus on them, but also he spoke in a *positive* sense by turning the conviction of wrong in a channel of repentance and acceptance of Jesus. The Holy Spirit operated mightily through him.

"But ye denied [Jesus] the Holy One and the Just [One]." This statement should have brought to mind Zechariah 9:9, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass." Jesus had come to them on a colt, "just, and having salvation."

The Jews had "desired a murderer to be granted" to them. They had (1) lynched an innocent person and (2) exonerated, or set free, a guilty one—two *startling* things. Lesson: The Christian is not to agree to a wrong act either overtly or through silence. Of course the scribes and the Pharisees had *plotted* Jesus' death, but many others were guilty *by association*.

Comment: Similar situations can occur today where we may know something that should be told, but we do not want to talk about it because the matter is delicate.

Reply: Probably all of us, in at least one portion of our life, even as a Christian, have been guilty of a cover-up of some kind, and we learn later that we should have done something differently. If that situation or incident becomes a stepping-stone for trying to improve our stance on a subsequent occasion where the same principle is involved, then the previous experience was of benefit to the new creature. Through discipline, the Christian should grow even after a failure. "A just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again" (Prov. 24:16). In other words, a Christian should purpose and make strenuous efforts to do better the next time. We can make mistakes, but what we should try to do, by God's grace, is to overcome.

Acts 3:15 And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses.

Again Peter's words were strong. "Ye [not only] *denied* the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; ... [but also] *killed the Prince of life*." God raised Jesus from the dead, and the apostles were direct witnesses of the resurrection, telling it forth with joy.

Acts 3:16 And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.

What a beautiful and powerful sermon Peter was giving in such few words! He was saying, "Here is the evidence. You see the cured man *before you*. He is strong and *right here*." The hearers knew the man, for they had seen him lame year after year as they passed through the Beautiful Gate. Therefore, Peter's words had to affect them deeply. The lame man was not just standing up, but he had "*perfect soundness*" and straightened limbs. (Some of Jesus' miracles even included the restoration of a *missing limb*, such as with a leper.)

Acts 3:17 And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers.

Notice Peter's compassion now. He himself had denied Christ, and Christ's mercy was on Peter in his sin because of the *honest, open, unabashed weeping and sorrow* for his denial of the Master. Peter knew he was forgiven because before ascending, Jesus appeared to him *personally* in a private audience to help restore him (1 Cor. 15:3-5). And Jesus pressed the matter again to make sure Peter's repentance was *lasting* (John 21:15-17).

“I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers.” This statement was true, generally speaking, but not of the chief priests and elders who paid hush money to the soldiers not to tell the truth and instead to give false testimony that the disciples had stolen Jesus’ body (Matt. 28:11-15). They were guilty of *willful* sin. However, Peter was speaking of a *class*, not of just a few individuals.

Comment: Under the Law, a sin of ignorance required a sacrifice, so this schooling, if taken to heart, would have produced the right results now in those who heard Peter’s sermon.

Reply: Yes, Peter was softening up those who were listening by giving them a ray of hope. They would think, “If that lame man was cured by faith in Jesus, is it possible that we can be forgiven for what we have done?” Peter, a *gruff, blunt individual*, spoke *very tenderly* here.

Acts 3:18 But those things, which God before had shown by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled.

Of course these Jews were not fully knowledgeable about what the prophets had said in regard to Christ’s sufferings, but from time to time, they would have heard Scriptures that raised questions and seemed to go against the common belief. However, the tendency was to brush off such Scriptures because of their culture and their schooling in one direction. Peter was saying, “Many of you are familiar with the Scriptures that show Christ would suffer.” Then Peter might have paused to let his hearers reflect on those Scriptures.

Comment: We often think of Acts 3:21, which says that the times of restitution were spoken of by *all* of God’s holy prophets, but we do not generally consider this verse about Christ’s sufferings being foretold by *all* of the prophets.

Acts 3:19 Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;

The Pastor gave an interesting analysis of why Jesus had to return at his Second Advent before sins could be blotted out. It is one thing for sins to be covered in the present life and another thing for them to be blotted out, or expunged. The robe of Christ’s righteousness covers blemishes, but when Jesus returns and the resurrection change takes place, the sins are thoroughly blotted out—first with the Church (starting with the sleeping saints) and then with the Great Company. Thus Peter was advising the hearers what to do, and the key was to “repent.”

Acts 3:20 And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you:

Acts 3:21 Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.

The heavens *must retain* (or *had to retain*) Jesus until the times of restitution, which were approximately 19 centuries down the stream of time. When Peter made this statement, the Holy Spirit was speaking through him. At this point, Jesus had already ascended into heaven and been there for more than ten days. When Jesus said previously that he would come again, the apostles did not know when, although Peter later realized that the Second Advent would be a long way off. Verses 19-21 suggest that the blotting out of sins and the refreshing are progressive, starting at or in the Second Advent.

Comment: In a *Volume* study, the “times of restitution” were said to be the cause, and the “times of refreshing” were the effect. Both terms refer to the same time period.

The statement “Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you” probably refers to what the prophets in the Old Testament had said about Jesus, but it could also refer to Peter’s previous sermon.

Acts 3:22 For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you.

This was *practical* advice. Moses was an individual sent by God to Israel in bondage to declare the time of their liberation. The Israelites saw both Moses and his miracles, and in Israel’s eyes, he was their greatest prophet. Now Peter was saying, “*Moses himself*, whom you admire, declared that *another being like him would come* and do miracles and have a somewhat comparable role.” The Jews could not help seeing that Jesus was a great prophet, for he even raised the dead.

“Him shall ye hear in all things.” Peter reasoned, “Way back there in the Wilderness of Sinai, Moses, whom you admire, said that a prophet would come whose ministry would be similar in many respects to his own, and this future prophet would teach Israel. Then Moses told you to listen carefully to all the words of that prophet when he comes.” Peter was exciting the minds of the hearing Jews with his powerful sermon, and we will see why as we proceed.

Acts 3:23 And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people.

Peter was telling them, “Moses warned you to watch for this prophet whom God would raise up. You better listen to him carefully, for those who refuse to heed him will be destroyed.” Although this is a prophecy of the Kingdom Age, it is also true of those enlightened ones in the Gospel Age who sin willfully and openly deny and reject Christ. The incorrigible are “destroyed,” not burned in hell.

Peter used wisdom in his sermon. He (1) convinced the listening Jews of their sin and (2) gave them hope of a way of escape by suggesting they (3) start with repentance. Then they (4) were to heed Jesus, the one like Moses. We should take a lesson from Peter and be careful not to give too liberal a message on restitution. If we say that *all* will be saved, we could be encouraging a reprobate not to mend his ways. The Old Testament says that those prophets who speak in God’s name and soft-soap certain things will be accountable. Peter himself had gone through the steps that are needed for true conversion.

Acts 3:24 Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days.

Acts 3:25 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.

Then Peter, using strong psychology, said to the Jews, “You are the children of the prophets. The covenant God made with Abraham was also made with Abraham’s seed. You are the children of Abraham; hence you are his seed.” Peter’s sermon shows that the Old Testament is important.

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

“God ... sent him [Jesus] to *bless* you.” After surgically operating on the Jewish listeners with a

powerful sermon, Peter showed *tenderness*. He was stirring up their emotions in different ways and was now saying, “The purpose of all this is to open your eyes of understanding to see the truth as it really is and to receive the blessing that God is offering you here, *now*, on this occasion. Unto *you* is given this opportunity. *Do not pass it by*. God sent Jesus to bless you in turning every one of you away from his iniquities.”

Comment: The lesson of the importance of the Old Testament comes through over and over again in this chapter.

Reply: Yes, the Lord’s Word consists of two parts, not just the New Testament.

Consider the setting of Peter’s sermon, which began at 3 p.m., the hour of prayer (Acts 3:1). Peter came *late* to the Temple and was about to enter to pray when he healed the lame man. Hearing about the miracle, crowds *rushed* to the site, and Peter then gave a long sermon. The apostle said to them, “Look at the man—he is whole! He was healed by faith *in Jesus Christ*. He is a witness to you by what has happened to him. The miracle came not because of us or our power but by faith in Jesus.” Then Peter began to sermonize—with *plain speech and power!* With pauses to let the words penetrate, the entire sermon might have taken just eight or ten minutes. It was now time to close down the Temple for the day, and the authorities wondered what was going on.

Chapter 3 ends here, but verses 1-4 of the next chapter should be part of Chapter 3 to continue the setting and realize the drama that was taking place.

Acts 4:1 And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them,

Acts 4:2 Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead.

Acts 4:3 And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide.

Acts 4:4 Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand.

Even though Peter and John were apprehended *in the sight of the people* who had been listening to Peter, the sermon was *so powerful* that 5,000 believed. Notice that the authorities (the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees) arrived and arrested Peter and John *as they were speaking*, and the two were detained overnight. In spite of this visible detention, Peter had spoken with such authority that 5,000 listening Jews *followed through on his advice and believed*. They were struck with conviction. In his sermon, Peter had given the steps, from beginning to end, that need to be taken for true conversion.

Q: Why were the Sadducees so upset?

A: They were especially upset because they did not believe in a resurrection. The Sadducees had a lot of influence in religious governmental affairs and were more like political religionists, whereas the Pharisees were sticklers for orthodoxy of the Law and tradition.

Acts 4:5 And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes,

Acts 4:6 And Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem.

Before we continue, let us review what had just happened. It was still the Pentecostal season, AD 33. A paralytic, crippled from birth for more than 40 years, had just been dramatically healed by Peter and John (Acts 4:22). The lame man was well known, for he had begged alms daily at the Beautiful Gate, being carried there each day. After the healing, Peter and John preached a powerful sermon to a large crowd. All of this activity took place at 3 p.m., the hour of prayer. So powerful was the sermon that 5,000 “men” believed (plus women). What a terrific conversion was taking place: 3,000 just before and now 5,000—more than in Jesus’ entire ministry! Jesus had to finish his sacrifice before the great influx could occur. In connection with the healing and the subsequent commotion, the authorities apprehended Peter and John and put them in the prison hold until the next morning, when there would be a formal hearing.

The next day prominent religious rulers, elders, and scribes presided at the hearing, with Annas, the high priest, having the superior position. Although the Apostle John was there with Peter, the “John” of verse 6 was not the apostle but someone who had a high position of authority, as did Alexander.

God arranged this situation in advance, going back to the lame man’s birth. It was intentional that Jesus’ miracles did not reach him so that Peter and John could come along later and heal him and there would be numerous conversions. Hence the gospel exploded with marvelous results at this time.

Acts 4:7 And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?

The religious rulers asked Peter and John, “By what power and by what name have you healed this man?” Their question shows that they were not present when Peter healed the lame man and gave his sermon. Peter had made it very clear that the miracle had been performed in Jesus’ name, and then he had used the miracle as the basis for giving a sermon, which penetrated thousands of hearts.

Acts 4:8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel,

Peter began to address the religious rulers with the *power* of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 4:9 If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole;

Acts 4:10 Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole.

Peter was preaching the gospel to the religious rulers and the elders of Israel. The presence of the cured man shows that the rulers tried to make the hearing *appear fair* (Acts 4:14). In a strong and straightforward way, Peter used the term “Jesus Christ of Nazareth” to show that through *this One*, who was looked down on by some because of his *humble* background—in *his* name—the miracle was done. *He* was the Messiah, and *they* had crucified him. Peter went on to say that subsequently, *God* raised Jesus from the dead, and now *God’s* authority and power did the miracle *through the name of Jesus*.

Jesus actually died, but the *ever-living* God *cannot die*. Therefore, verse 10 disproves the Trinity. God and Jesus are neither coequal nor coeternal. Jesus said, “I am he that ... *was dead*; and, behold, I am [now] alive for evermore” (Rev. 1:18). The distinction between the Father and the

Son is apparent. They are not equal.

Acts 4:11 This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner.

Verse 11 refers to Psalm 118:22, “The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner.” Evidently, the religious leaders were familiar with the Great Pyramid, and Peter was explaining that the head cornerstone, that is, the top stone of the Pyramid, represents Jesus.

Comment: The listeners did not even have to search their memories back to the Old Testament, for Jesus had unlocked the mystery of the top stone by identifying it as himself. “Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?” (Matt. 21:42). The context shows the chief priests and the elders were present, and they understood that Jesus was identifying them as the “builders” who “set at nought” (rejected) the antitypical top stone. “When the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of *them*” (Matt. 21:45).

Reply: On that occasion, Jesus was explaining Psalm 118:22, a mysterious text. Both the Old and New Testaments contain Scriptures that allude to the Great Pyramid and the top stone.

Q: How were the religious rulers the “builders”?

A: They were the leaders and the representatives of the Jewish race. The spiritual temple began with the Jew and was for the Jew, but so few accepted the gospel message to build the mystical pyramid structure that the message then went out to the Gentiles. In his first epistle, Peter spoke of this structure, saying that we are “lively stones” built up into Jesus, the head of the corner (1 Pet. 2:5-8).

Comment: It is interesting that the foundation of this mystical structure is on the top. A foundation is usually on the bottom.

The *office* of the high priest was ordained of God, but the one who occupied the office was another matter. A similar principle applies to spiritual Israel. The organization of the Christian Church is under the one head, Jesus, but Papacy has used a half truth to make the pope the head. Half truth, that is, truth with arsenic mixed in, can be just as deadly as the straight poison. With its half truth, Papacy has set aside the real “top stone.” And natural Israel also set aside the top stone through its religious leaders, who were under the guise of being the *moral* leaders and *instructors* of the people.

In other words, in the antitypical construction of the Gospel Age, the top stone has been set aside by both natural and spiritual nominal Israel. Verse 11 is one text that shows the Great Pyramid will be refurbished to be in alignment with the literal top stone, which will be brought forth and placed on top. Because the top stone was too large, it was not put on the Pyramid at the time of construction or at any time subsequently. Down through the ages, the top stone has remained buried under the sand not far from the Pyramid, and it will be found and placed on the Pyramid in the near future (Zech. 4:7). Then smooth, properly sized casing stones will be added.

Tradition says that Shem was given a book of instructions on how to construct the Pyramid. The top stone was prepared and left sitting on the ground while the builders started at the bottom and constructed the Pyramid higher and higher, but lo and behold, when they finished the platform at the top, they realized that the top stone was too large. Even if the builders had

removed the top layer, there would still be a problem. Therefore, the top stone was rejected.

By the way, Shem had Egyptian laborers build the Pyramid for the most part, and the powerful antitypical lesson is that the bulk of the building of the spiritual temple has been done by tares. The “professed” Church of Christ includes tares, the Great Company, and the Little Flock.

Incidentally, the casing stones caused another problem. Even if the top stone had fit, it could not be lifted into place with smooth, slippery sides on the Pyramid. In other words, the core masonry was needed to get the top stone into position. Now that the top stone had been rejected, it was in the way when the builders tried to fit all of the casing stones to the Pyramid. Therefore, the builders pushed it aside, and in time, drifting sands covered it. The top stone, which is still in existence, awaits discovery in God’s due time.

Imagine the courage of Peter, the *fisherman*, to speak like this to the religious *rulers* with their gorgeous robes! They would have looked down on the apostle from an elevated level.

Acts 4:12 Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

Peter included himself and John: “There is none other name under heaven ... whereby we must be saved.”

Acts 4:13 Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.

The rulers and elders noted “the boldness of Peter and John.” Evidently, John spoke too, although his words were not recorded. John probably also nodded his head when Peter spoke. These two stood out among the apostles.

Notice the attitude of the educated religious leaders. They regarded both Peter and John as “unlearned and ignorant men” because they were unlettered in the rabbinical school. However, the apostles spoke very powerfully with coherent reasoning. The rabbis, who were schooled to speak with a singsong or rhythmic presentation, looked down on the apostles because of their lack of “official” credentials. In God’s sight, however, affected mannerisms and intonations mean nothing. *Substance* is what counts.

Comment: Here is an instance where the “foolish things” of this world were confounding those who were supposedly “wise” (1 Cor. 1:27).

The rulers saw “that they [Peter and John] had been with Jesus”; that is, they saw that Jesus’ mannerisms had rubbed off on the two apostles. Jesus was not brought up in the rabbinical school, but he had spoken *powerfully* and straightforwardly. Many times he had rebuked the rulers.

Acts 4:14 And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.

Acts 4:15 But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves,

After telling Peter, John, and the healed man to leave the council, the rulers conferred among themselves as to how to handle the situation.

Acts 4:16 Saying, What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it.

The priests and religious rulers said, “What should we do to Peter and John? That they performed a notable miracle is manifest to *all who dwell in Jerusalem*, and we cannot deny it.” But the religious leaders did not apply the lesson *to themselves*. How *blind* they were in their positions of *great authority*!

Acts 4:17 But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name.

Acts 4:18 And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.

In conclusion, the religious leaders decided to threaten Peter, John, and the lame man, and no doubt they sternly shook their fingers at the apostles in reprimand: “Do not speak or teach in the *name* of Jesus anymore!” To this day, some Jews forbid the mention of Jesus’ name in their homes.

Acts 4:19 But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.

Acts 4:20 For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.

Peter and John immediately had an answer of which only part is recorded. They handed the question right back to the rulers: “Whether it is right to hearken more to God or to you, *you* judge—and be responsible for the decision.”

Acts 4:21 So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done.

The rulers could do no more than threaten because of the sentiments of the people. The miracle was too startling to ignore.

Acts 4:22 For the man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was shown.

The lame man who was healed was 40-plus years old. Therefore, if the birth of this man was prearranged by God, it was planned *before* Christ’s ministry began—and even before he was born to Mary. The “actors” were chosen providentially, in advance, to be on the scene.

Acts 4:23 And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them.

Acts 4:24 And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is:

Acts 4:25 Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things?

Acts 4:26 The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ.

Acts 4:27 For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together,

Acts 4:28 For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.

Peter and John returned to the brethren, who, when they heard what had happened, praised God “with one accord.” Then Peter and John quoted part of the Second Psalm, giving it a current application at that time. The “[religious] rulers” were Annas, Caiaphas, and the Sanhedrin, and the “kings” were Herod and Pontius Pilate. The “heathen” were the Gentiles, including the Roman soldiers. In their evil ways, they did what God had predetermined to be done.

Comment: The prayer of the brethren in unison began, “Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is.” Sometimes Jesus is incorrectly credited with doing some of the creative works, but this verse is accurate and very strong about the Father’s being the Creator.

Reply: Yes, and that is a subject in itself.

Acts 4:29 And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word,

Acts 4:30 By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus.

Acts 4:31 And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.

When the brethren prayed for *boldness* to speak God’s Word, the place in which they were assembled *shook*, and they were filled with the Holy Spirit. Their prayer was answered, and as accepted vessels, they were *emboldened* to speak the Word. Imagine the room shaking! What a wonderful start for those in the early Church! What a marvelous way to give them the fire and zeal to get going! The 8,000 converts who were added to the Church (5,000 plus 3,000) included both residents of Israel and Jews from other lands who had come to Jerusalem that year to observe Passover and Pentecost.

Q: In verses 27 and 30, the disciples used the phrase “thy holy *child* Jesus.” Was this because they were so in awe of the power of the Father that they magnified Him far above Jesus?

A: Yes. The Greek word translated “child” can also mean a “young person” or a “servant.” The scholars did not want to use “servant,” for that term would cut out a cornerstone of the Trinity. Whether the Holy Spirit meant “child” or “servant” is hard to say, but usually that Greek word was translated “servant.” The gender is male.

If “child” is the correct translation, deference was being given to the Father in that the *vastly superior* God sent His holy *child*. We are reminded of the beginning of Isaiah 9:6, one of the most prominent texts in the Old Testament: “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given.” Messiah was to be born of the *Hebrew* race. Peter may have meant, “*This one who has grown up in our midst* from infancy is the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah 9:6. His name Immanuel means ‘God in our midst.’ The government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.”

Comment: In the annunciation to Mary in the beginning of Luke, the angel said, “That holy *thing* which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35).

Youth and innocency were involved, especially with the Hebrew word for “maiden,” which is translated “virgin” in Isaiah 7:14. “Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a *virgin* shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.” A maiden, or virgin, is unsullied. If the Old Testament prophecy meant just a “young woman” and not a “virgin,” what would be unusual about a *young woman* having a child? This prophecy was meant to be a *sign*.

Acts 4:32 And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that aught of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.

Acts 4:33 And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.

Acts 4:34 Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold,

Acts 4:35 And laid them down at the apostles’ feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.

Acts 4:36 And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus,

Acts 4:37 Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles’ feet.

A little time elapsed between verses 31 and 32. A paragraph mark should have been inserted before verse 32, for the brethren needed time to sell their property and cash in their assets and lay them at the apostles’ feet. For example, Barnabas had to return to the island of Cyprus to sell his property there and then return. There were no telephones in those days! Apparently, Barnabas was singled out because he was a man of considerable means.

Barnabas, who had a background of training as a Levite and thus was familiar with the Old Testament, was also singled out because he would shortly become a companion of the Apostle Paul. He was John Mark’s uncle. Note that the *apostles* surnamed him “Barnabas,” meaning “son of consolation.” With some of the more notable disciples, the apostles evidently copied Jesus’ practice of giving a new and appropriate name (for instance, Simon was called “Peter”).

All of the disciples sold their possessions and “had all things common” (Acts 2:44,45). No one lacked. They were practicing communism in the idealistic sense, but the arrangement did not work in the final analysis. However, at this time, their hearts were burning in them, and they felt they were showing brotherly love.

When some of us initially got the truth, one of the first things we did as individuals was to contact our friends and let them know about the new-found revelation. Therefore, we can imagine what happened when 5,000 were converted *at one time*. There would have been quite a *zealous and enthusiastic* outburst of preaching of the gospel. Making their presence known, they *joyously proclaimed* Jesus’ *resurrection*, a *living Christ*, for the nation had seen him *die* on the Cross. And they prayed for power to speak *with boldness* (Acts 4:31).

Acts 5:1 But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession,

Acts 5:2 And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

Ananias and Sapphira, his wife, sold a possession and kept back part of the price. This would not have been wrong to do under *other* circumstances, but at that time, there was a consenting agreement among the brethren to dispose of earthly assets and convert them to cash or to use them (for example, a house) wholly in the Lord's service. They had agreed to hold all things in common to benefit the brotherhood and to distribute to individual brethren in proportion to necessity. The problem was that Ananias sold his property and then pretended, or claimed, to have given all the money from the sale of a possession into the common treasury when, in fact, he had held back a portion. He laid the money "at the apostles' feet." This deception was a sin against the Holy Spirit.

According to Acts 4:36,37, Joses Barnabas sold a large parcel of land on the island of Cyprus and put all the money into the common treasury. The very name "Barnabas" indicates he was generous in spirit and temperament. Thus he was an example of one with means who faithfully obeyed the agreed-upon procedure. Many others followed suit with their all, whether it was little or great. The incident with Ananias was the opposite.

Comment: It is amazing that Ananias did not realize the apostles would see through his deception when they were doing many miracles and understood many things.

Reply: When the mind is bent on something, the individual does not realize the abnormality. Things are done openly today that were considered shameful in years past. People are giving in to inclinations along various lines of the flesh. As a result, society has become inured to many sins, and the people feel God is not paying particular attention to deeds committed.

Acts 5:3 But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?

Acts 5:4 Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.

Since all are born in sin and "shapen in iniquity," all have weaknesses (Psa. 51:5). Satan capitalizes on those weaknesses and tries to subvert our obedience to do God's will. Peter blamed Satan, but that did not excuse Ananias for succumbing to this pressure. Another example is the serpent's beguiling of Eve. Satan was a liar and a deceiver from the beginning, but Adam and Eve were both culpable, and Adam more so because of more knowledge. Moreover, the test of obedience was specifically addressed to him.

Q: This was a lie to God, not to man. If Ananias had lied to one individual, it would have been a lie unto man, but his lie affected the whole Church because they held all things in common. If one *intentionally* deceived through a public testimony (not a slip of the tongue through nervousness), wouldn't this be lying to the Holy Spirit?

A: There was consensual agreement among the brotherhood. Perhaps they all raised their hands—or had some other type of *public* agreement—to show that all were of one accord. Their agreement meant a contract was made with God, and the agreement preceded the sale of Ananias's possession. Even the act of laying the money at the apostles' feet was like saying, "Here is the money as *previously* agreed upon." And Ananias probably made additional comments, not recorded, when he laid the money at their feet.

Q: Despite the agreement, if Ananias had said he decided to keep part of the money, would that have been permissible? But *to lie* was an abomination.

A: Peter was saying that originally, when the proposal was made, one did not have to raise a hand in agreement. But once the hand was raised, the individual had to follow through. The fact that *all* agreed suggests a *public* agreement. There was some public act whereby Ananias incurred the responsibility of lying against the Holy Spirit.

Q: In this case, a contractual agreement was made. What about consecration? When one *publicly* professes consecration, if he does not have the heart intention of fully giving himself to do the Lord's will (that is, if he is not making a *full and unreserved* consecration), wouldn't that be lying?

A: The principle with Ananias and Sapphira puts a very serious construction on a professed consecration. *Whether or not* one really means the consecration in his heart, he is liable, and there is responsibility. The consecration vow means giving *everything*—heart, mind, soul, and body—to the Lord, and no one can perform it perfectly. In the final analysis, only a *Little Flock* will live up to their consecration to the full extent of their ability. There are failings of the flesh, and the Lord knows to what degree they are factors to be overcome. In the type, the Lord's goat died as an acceptable sacrifice to God, but the live goat, picturing the Great Company, had to be led out into the wilderness by providence. In contrast to the depth of the consecration vow, for Ananias to give all of the money would have been a relatively simple promise to keep.

Acts 5:5 And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things.

A number of witnesses were present, and others quickly heard of the incident because of the strange and sudden power that Peter manifested on behalf of the Holy Spirit. When Ananias exhaled his last breath, he probably made a noise, adding to the drama. He *suddenly* dropped dead after hearing Peter's words of condemnation. The noise and the suddenness impressed upon the onlookers the power of God's Spirit and the lesson of the seriousness and responsibility of consecration. Great awe came upon them.

Q: The *Reprints* take a softer view, but would Ananias and Sapphira have been begotten of the Holy Spirit?

A: Yes, that would seem to be the case, for the incident occurred after Pentecost. Moreover, God is not constrained to give a certain time to each of the consecrated. If one commits an act that is obnoxious to Him and He sees that the individual has passed the point of no return, showing incorrigibility, God may or may not suddenly requite the act. Some who commit the sin unto death continue to live for a number of years, and some do not. God's promise was that if an individual's heart is right and he is trying to do his best and is praying and asking for help, then he is guaranteed a sufficiency of time. But if one is in the wrong attitude of heart and has committed grievous sin, God might exact the penalty right away. With Ananias and Sapphira, the quick penalty more forcibly pointed out to the other Christians the seriousness of the sin. If their death had occurred a week later, the brethren might have thought it was due to natural causes. Ananias had just laid the money at the apostles' feet, Peter reprimanded him, and he dropped dead. The judgment could not have been more obvious.

Q: Two clues to indicate that Ananias and Sapphira were consecrated and Spirit-begotten are as follows: (1) The believers were "of *one* heart and of *one* soul" (Acts 4:32). At least they had all *professed* a consecration. If any were not Spirit-begotten, they were still responsible for their professed vow. (2) The expression that Ananias laid the money "at the apostles' feet" would

not make sense if Ananias had not professed a consecration. Why else would he do such a thing?

A: And a *process* was involved in selling property, so there was *time* to consider or conspire, as the case might be.

Acts 5:6 And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him.

The traditional way of burying was to wind cloth(s) around and around the body, but in this case, the winding would have been done hurriedly in a makeshift way and probably with old cloth(s). As a *known* adversary of God, Ananias would not have received the usual careful burial. To keep from getting defiled by touching a dead body, the young men would have followed the custom of carrying the body in a coat and holding the sleeves. They would have buried him in either the Kidron Valley or the Valley of Hinnom.

The burial took place quickly to put Ananias out of sight and out of mind as fast as possible. His wife was not even notified. In addition, the Holy Spirit would have moved the young men to act in haste so that when Sapphira came on the scene shortly afterwards, she would not know what had happened (verse 7).

Comment: This account is a clue that we are not to mourn and have a regular “Bible Student” funeral for any of the consecrated who might commit grievous sin and not repent of the act.

Acts 5:7 And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in.

Acts 5:8 And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much.

Acts 5:9 Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out.

Just three hours after Ananias died, Sapphira showed up. Here is a clue that some conversation had taken place when Ananias laid the money at the apostles’ feet, for Peter knew the supposed price paid for the land. The guilt had occurred twice: when Ananias agreed with Sapphira and when he lied at the time he gave the money to the apostles. It was like a twofold sealing of his fate. Now Peter directed a very pertinent question to Sapphira: “Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much?” And she also lied.

Acts 5:10 Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband.

The young men buried Ananias and returned, coming in right after Sapphira had dropped dead. Now they had a second body to bury. How startling!

Acts 5:11 And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.

This wording is similar to the end of verse 5. Great fear (awe) came upon all who “heard these things.” As indicated in the Book of Revelation, the working of Jesus was mighty in the early Church through the apostles (Rev. 2:1). Many miracles were performed in the Ephesus period, and the power and presence of the Holy Spirit were manifest in a remarkable way.

Acts 5:12 And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among

the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch.

Acts 5:13 And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them.

Acts 5:14 And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.)

Acts 5:15 Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them.

Acts 5:16 There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one.

Verses 13 and 14 are not a contradiction. Many more subsequently consecrated, but they thought much more soberly about the responsibilities of a commitment before making a consecration. Consequently, the first period of the Church was called "Ephesus," meaning "desirable." The Ephesus period had the freshness of the apostles' power, which was a good influence.

Great numbers of believers were added to the Church after Pentecost: 3,000, 5,000, and now many more. Here we get the feel of the situation. Daily the apostles and the multitudes were at the Temple, whose precincts were about the size of a football field. In fact, the multitudes were so great that the people could not all hope to get access to Peter or John or another apostle. Therefore, some apparently thought, "When we exit the Temple gate, we will wait until Peter's shadow falls on us." Their determination reminds us of the woman who touched the hem of Jesus' garment and of Zacchaeus, who climbed a tree to see Jesus. *Faith* was the element that prompted them to seek this indirect contact.

By no means would all of the healed ones have been consecrated—any more than they were with Jesus—but some of them were. The desire of the vast majority was simply for healing and help, not to make a lifetime commitment unto death.

The apostles had left their employment in the fishing business up in Galilee and were now supported with a minimal amount from the common fund for necessities. Hence they could spend all of their time preaching, and daily they went to the Temple, especially Solomon's Porch.

The great number of Jews entering the gospel Church at the beginning of the Gospel Age constituted the Jewish harvest. Approximately one third of the Little Flock (48,000) was selected in the Ephesus period of the Church, one third (48,000) was developed down through the Gospel Age, and one third (48,000) is being developed in Laodicea, the Harvest period here at the end of the age. Probably the smallest number of the Great Company came from Ephesus because of the type of individuals who gave their hearts to the Lord. There would have been fewer tares in the Church in that period too. The apostles' teachings, sermons, and applications of the principles of truth as to right and wrong were *perfectly* presented—and the hearers could ask questions and get *perfect* answers.

Comment: Yet all in Asia forsook Paul, and a Jewish Christian element was undermining the apostles.

Reply: Yes, and many of those who forsook Paul could have been Great Company. Those of the Great Company class sometimes think they are wiser than the Little Flock class. Stated another way, the foolish virgins sometimes think they are wiser than the wise virgins. And that has been the case down through the Gospel Age. The Apostle Paul certainly had that

experience. An Old Testament example is Elihu (a type of the Great Company) versus Job (a picture of the Little Flock). Psalm 91:7 says, “A thousand [Great Company] shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand [tares] at thy right hand.”

Comment: The apostles could read the hearts and discern hypocrites. That ability helped to keep the Church pure.

“The rest” (verse 13) had enough faith to seek healing but not enough faith to consecrate. Many were fearful of what the Pharisees and the leadership would think. Others declined because the standard was so high. And some just came as onlookers or curiosity seekers.

Acts 5:17 Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation,

Acts 5:18 And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison.

Acts 5:19 But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said,

Acts 5:20 Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.

Acts 5:21 And when they heard that, they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught. But the high priest came, and they that were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought.

Acts 5:22 But when the officers came, and found them not in the prison, they returned, and told,

Acts 5:23 Saying, The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors: but when we had opened, we found no man within.

For days, the apostles had been teaching the multitudes, but now those in the priesthood felt they had to stop the apostles. They were forced to confront the issue, as it were. Verse 17 shows the high priest of the nation was probably a Sadducee, which means he did not believe in the resurrection and was liberal—something like Reform Jewry today. Hence the religious leadership had little faith. Moreover, the leadership was filled with indignation (an *outward* manifestation) and envy (an *inward* wrong heart condition). Earlier the leaders had envied Jesus, and now indignation helped them to mask their *envy*, which was the real problem.

A “common prison” was like a temporary overnight hold until an individual could be sent to an actual prison or released or whatever. At night, an angel who could be seen opened the prison doors for the apostles and led them out. He walked in front of them and magically opened the doors. The angel instructed the apostles to go back to the Temple and preach, and the apostles obeyed, going right away to the Temple early the next morning.

The high priest “called the council [the Sanhedrin] together, and [even] all the senate [the elders].” He was unaware that the apostles had been freed, so he sent officers to the prison to bring them before the Sanhedrin for trial. However, the officers returned to the *august* Sanhedrin and reported that everything in the prison was intact and locked but that the apostles were free. *The cell was empty!* Even the guards were unaware that the apostles had left. This incident shows the power of the angels to blind the eyes of men to not see *literal* apostles walking out of a *literal* prison through *literal* gates. Probably the prison or cell doors were solid so that the guards could not see in and just assumed the prisoners were still there.

Acts 5:24 Now when the high priest and the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these things, they doubted of them whereunto this would grow.

Acts 5:25 Then came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people.

Acts 5:26 Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence: for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned.

Someone informed those of the Sanhedrin, who were waiting to render judgment, that the apostles were back in the Temple teaching the people. Officers were sent posthaste to get the apostles and bring them to the Sanhedrin. The apostles were brought back without violence, lest the multitudes get angry and stone the officers.

Acts 5:27 And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them,

Acts 5:28 Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us.

The high priest was trying to say that the Sanhedrin had acted properly in apprehending the apostles. The high priest accused the apostles of filling Jerusalem with their doctrine and blaming the religious leadership for Jesus' death, whereas he felt there was no liability for what had been done.

Acts 5:29 Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.

What a marvelous reply by Peter and the other apostles! Without fear of man, they said, "We ought to obey *God* rather than men" (compare Acts 4:19). Who could refute such an argument?

Acts 5:30 The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree.

The apostles were saying, "We do not preach a heathen doctrine but the doctrine of the Old Testament, as taught by Moses and the prophets." Their supposedly new doctrine came from the *same* Jewish God, who had raised up Jesus as the Messiah, "whom ye slew." The apostles were *firm* on this last point.

The gist of the accusation and powerful reply of verses 28-30 was as follows: The high priest said, "You are teaching the people that we are guilty of the blood of Jesus." The apostles were not diplomatic in their response: "Yes, you *did do that*. But God raised up Jesus in resurrection power, so the one you slew is now a *living* Savior." Peter was direct and outspoken. Notice that he likened the Cross to a *tree*, indicating the counterpart of Jesus' suffering for Adam. Sin entered the Garden of Eden through a *tree*. Adam ate the fruit of a *tree* and died, and Jesus tasted death on a *tree* (Gen. 3:6).

Acts 5:31 Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.

God (one personality) exalted Jesus (a *separate* personality). If Jesus were God, how could God exalt Jesus to His right hand? Moreover, a "Prince" is not on as high a level as the Almighty King of the universe, so they are not coequal.

On the one hand, Peter's words to the Sanhedrin were *strong*, yet on the other hand, he left open a door of escape: *repentance*. Jesus was designed to be a Prince and a Savior in order to grant forgiveness of sins to Israel—if they would repent and confess their sins. That would include even the religious leadership if there were some contrition for what they had done.

Acts 5:32 And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.

We are reminded of Jesus' scathing remarks to the scribes and the Pharisees when he called them hypocrites and whited sepulchers. Peter was saying, "If you had the Holy Spirit, you would see things in the proper light and realize what a horrendous act you committed." The implication was that they had disobeyed.

Acts 5:33 When they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them.

Acts 5:34 Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space;

Acts 5:35 And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men.

Acts 5:36 For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought.

Acts 5:37 After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed.

Acts 5:38 And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought:

Acts 5:39 But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.

The Sanhedrin wanted to *kill* the apostles for their cutting remarks, not just imprison them. Then the Holy Spirit prompted Gamaliel to speak. (This Gamaliel had taught Paul and was very helpful to him, imparting much sound wisdom and Scriptural understanding.) By the power of the Holy Spirit and the leading of divine providence, Gamaliel nipped the situation in the bud by providing the Sanhedrin a way out of the embarrassment caused by Peter's stinging remarks. In essence, Gamaliel's counsel was as follows: "Let us consider and not be too hasty. Others such as Theudas and Judas of Galilee have arisen as false Christs in Israel, but where are those movements now? They fizzled, and this current movement will similarly come to nought if it is of men." Then he presented the other side of the coin: "If the movement is of God, it will survive, and we do not want to stand in the way of God." What powerful reasoning and *sound logic!*

Gamaliel was probably a believer like Nicodemus, but he needed something to draw him out. Of those in the Sanhedrin, Gamaliel was the most renowned for wisdom. Incidentally, Bar Kochba was a false Christ later on.

Acts 5:40 And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

Acts 5:41 And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.

Acts 5:42 And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.

Again the apostles were commanded not to speak in Jesus' name, and they were beaten with 39 stripes—one stripe short of death. However, they rejoiced because they recalled Jesus' words that they would be taken before synagogues and beaten, and when this happened, they were to rejoice in the privilege of suffering in his name (Mark 13:9; 1 Pet. 4:13,16). They responded as Paul and Silas did years later in a prison in Philippi, Macedonia (Acts 16:19-25). The beating, though severe, did not deter their preaching or diminish their zeal. "Preaching" was giving a sermon; "teaching" took place after the sermon when some inquired further. This inquiring element was likely to become disciples. What wonderful history and constructive information God has given to help us see the right and the wrong!

Acts 6:1 And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration.

Acts 6:2 Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables.

"Grecian" Jews (from other lands) murmured against the "Hebrew" Jews (from Israel) for neglecting their widows. It was still the first year, AD 33, and all things were held in common (Acts 2:44,45). Apparently, partiality was being shown to Jews in Israel versus Jews from foreign lands. Nothing lacked earlier, but now the widows of Jews in foreign lands were lacking (Acts 4:34). Foreign Jews all spoke Greek, the international language, so "Grecian Jews" came from Northern Africa, Asia Minor, and Europe. The Grecian Jews were not viewed as favorably as the Hebrew Jews, who resided in the Holy Land. This distinction exists even today, for many Jews in Israel look with askance on Jews living in the United States and elsewhere, feeling that their duty and responsibility are in Israel.

With the number of disciples multiplying daily, the distribution of goods had become too time-consuming and burdensome to the apostles. Serving tables and assisting in the daily ministration distracted them from their main purpose of preaching the gospel. Therefore, the apostles called the disciples together and said (paraphrased), "It is not right that we should leave preaching the word of God, and serve tables." At this time, "the twelve" included Matthias because Paul had not been called yet.

Acts 6:3 Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.

The apostles recommended that the *brethren* select or appoint *seven* honest, wise, holy, Spirit-begotten men to take care of the daily ministration of the needs of the brotherhood. The recommendation for seven suggests that *seven* messengers would be appointed by the Holy Spirit to distribute *spiritual* food to the Church down through the Gospel Age in *seven* portions.

Murmuring about the partiality being shown to widows in Israel is what precipitated the appointing of seven men as deacons. The appointment started to lay down the principle of having deacons as well as elders. So that there would be *regional* appointees, the apostles left the selection of the seven deacons to the brethren.

Comment: It is not that an elder would not perform a very humble task, but with *regular* duties, common sense would say to recognize the talents of others and to provide assistance in ways that would give more free time to those with the greatest ability to teach and prophesy.

Comment: A practical reason for having *seven* deacons was so that each deacon would serve only once a week.

Acts 6:4 But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.

Prayer, as well as the ministry of the Word, was given a priority by the apostles. Prayer was frequent in the early Church, especially for the Lord's direction in decision making and in the expending of funds, efforts, and energy.

Acts 6:5 And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch:

The suggestion to appoint seven deacons pleased the whole multitude because the dispute over the widows was factional. Of the seven who were chosen, Stephen, "a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit," was highly commended. Philip, who was from Caesarea, was probably the evangelist who intercepted the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 21:8). Nicolas was a proselyte from Antioch, where the word "Christian" was first used (Acts 11:26). According to tradition, the Nicolaitan doctrine started with this deacon. Antioch was an important location, from which Paul and Barnabas often began and ended their journeys.

Acts 6:6 Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.

After the congregation, or brotherhood, appointed the seven deacons at the suggestion of the apostles, the apostles prayed and laid their hands on the seven, indicating *approval* (not authority to preach). This was the first instance of laying on of hands in the early Church.

Acts 6:7 And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.

The number of disciples kept multiplying, starting in Jerusalem in harmony with Jesus' instructions. He had said to begin in Jerusalem and all Judea, and then to go to Samaria and finally to Gentiles in all the earth (Acts 1:8).

A "great company" of priests were "obedient to the faith." Originally only Aaron and his four sons constituted the priesthood, but as time went on, the children of Aaron greatly increased so that thousands of priests were in Jerusalem when the Church began. Therefore, when the narrative tells that "a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith," the "great" number of believers could have been just 10 or 15 percent.

Comment: John 12:42,43 says that many of the "chief rulers" believed on Jesus, but for fear of the Pharisees, "they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: For they loved the *praise of men* more than the praise of God." After Jesus' resurrection, many of this group gained the courage to openly declare their faith.

Reply: Yes, they became bolder, and the increasing number of other believing Jews made it easier for them to confess their faith. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea were exceptions in that they manifested their boldness after Jesus' crucifixion but prior to his resurrection, when Christianity seemed to be at its lowest ebb.

Acts 6:8 And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.

Stephen was *so full of faith* that God especially blessed him to do “great wonders” and miracles of healing, opening blind eyes, etc. He was *so zealous* for the Lord that he made his calling and election sure in a brief time and could be martyred almost immediately.

Comment: For him to be appointed as one of the seven deacons, his unusual character had to be apparent to others in various ways.

Reply: The Lord blessed Stephen in a very special manner, for the account does not mention the miracles and powers of the other deacons. It would be interesting to know what his “great miracles” were, as the Scriptures do not specify. With Peter, even his *shadow* could cause healing (Acts 5:15). Like Jesus when the woman touched the hem of his garment, Peter did not have to give direct attention to the individual. *Faith* was the receptor for such miracles (Matt. 9:20-22). Also, handkerchiefs passed out by the apostles caused healing, particularly with Paul. Evidently, Stephen, who was not an apostle, could do similar great wonders. For him to have such power was unusual, and it not only helped to keep the apostles humble in their office but also guarded against the concept of a hierarchy.

Q: Based on what Stephen did, would he really have been an elder?

A: Only in God’s sight would he have been an elder, for he was not voted to that office. Consider Paul. Even though the disciples laid hands on Paul when he went with Barnabas, his authority and ability to perform miracles came *from God*, not men. God had dealt with him in a very singular way, apart from the disciples. The disciples were merely privileged to share in his ministry by giving moral (and possibly financial) support. The power given to Stephen to perform great wonders and miracles was specially designed to keep the apostles humble.

Comment: The timing of giving Stephen this power so early in the history of the Church was providential because Paul was on the scene to witness Stephen’s activities, and Paul had to become an apostle very quickly to replace Matthias.

Acts 6:9 Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen.

The Libertines were probably from Libya, Africa, and the Cyrenians and the Alexandrians were from different sections of that same continent. In early Church history, Alexandria was very influential, that is, before authority developed in Rome and Constantinople. However, to favor the spread of the gospel, the Book of Acts concentrated on Paul’s ministry and more or less ignored what occurred in Alexandria. We recall that Paul was from the city of Tarsus in the region of Cilicia. At any rate, the Jews from these places got into a disputation with Stephen.

Acts 6:10 And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.

Acts 6:11 Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God.

In promulgating the doctrine of Christ, Stephen reasoned from the Old Testament to show that the Messiah would come from the seed of the Jews and that he had already come. These foreign Jews were all opposed to the thought that Jesus was that Messiah. “Stephen” in Greek (*stephanos*) means “crown.” The suggestion is that Stephen was able to dispute with them very

capably in their own tongue. Even though the foreign Jews felt a sense of ostracism from the Jews in Israel, they considered themselves to be mentally superior because, generally speaking, they had more education. In fact, Grecians were renowned for their knowledge.

The foreign Jews “were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit” of Stephen. His “wisdom” was his Scriptural knowledge and reasoning plus his ability to counter their arguments. He also had a “spirit” of power and grace in that he spoke powerfully but tactfully, and a radiance surrounded him (see Acts Chapter 7).

To “suborn” means to induce someone to commit perjury, that is, to be a false witness. Unprincipled men were paid or rewarded in some way to give false testimony against Stephen. What happened to Stephen is similar to what happened to Jesus prior to his crucifixion. False witnesses said that Stephen blasphemed Moses and God. In other words, because he used Scriptures about Moses to reason that Jesus was the Messiah, certain Jews who were not accustomed to this type of reasoning accused Stephen of blasphemy.

Acts 6:12 And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council,

The foreign Jews stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes against Stephen and then seized him and took him to the Sanhedrin.

Acts 6:13 And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law:

Acts 6:14 For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.

False witnesses testified that Stephen blasphemed “this holy place [Jerusalem and the Temple], and the law.” Of course the gospel message did take away the priority of the literal Temple and the literal city. For example, Jesus said that the time would come when the people would no longer have to go to Jerusalem to pray to God (John 4:21-23). However, Stephen did not blaspheme the Law but spoke about the true portent of things in the Law of which the Jews were completely ignorant.

“Nazareth” was mentioned to demean Jesus. The accusation against Stephen was, “We have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered” to the Jews. Stephen did “change the customs,” but he did this with *Biblical* authority. Stephen merely spoke according to the Scriptures, but the false witnesses did not report that fact. In other words, what they did *not* say—their *half truths*—constituted the false witness. Half truths can be just as damaging as a complete falsehood because they give a wrong impression.

For Stephen to have so much knowledge and to be able to speak on such deep things proves he received instruction and knowledge *before* Christ’s ministry began. He was a Jew learned in the Law.

Acts 6:15 And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.

All who “sat in the council” noticed that Stephen’s face was like “the face of an angel”—*even before* he began his defense. His countenance did not look worried or guilty. The implication is that he was peaceful, full of repose, and confident and that he had a look of innocence. How remarkable! Many would feel guilty just by being brought to the council and seeing so many

men sitting in judgment but not Stephen. Not only was he not ashamed to testify about Jesus, but he patiently waited to testify.

Acts 7:1 Then said the high priest, Are these things so?

After the charges were leveled against Stephen, the high priest asked him, “Are these things true?” Stephen did not say yes or no but gave his answer in his own way, as we will see. His response is a good example to show that we are not obligated to answer just yes or no. The high priest at that time was either Annas or Caiaphas.

Acts 7:2 And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran,

Notice Stephen’s composure. Calmly and without fear, he started way back with Abraham, using a historical approach. He was accustomed to defending his views, and this current situation was just another occasion (Acts 6:10). Stephen was very learned, perhaps as learned as Paul before his conversion. “Charran” is Haran.

Q: Whom was Stephen addressing in starting his defense with the words “Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken”?

A: The judge and the jury were the higher echelon of religious authority in Israel. How many others were present, we do not know.

Acts 7:3 And said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall show thee.

In tracing the Israelites’ beginning, Stephen started with Abraham, not Jacob. Stephen wanted to show that Jesus was a son of Abraham.

Acts 7:4 Then came he out of the land of the Chaldaeans, and dwelt in Charran: and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell.

What was Stephen emphasizing here? Abraham left the land of the Chaldeans and dwelled in Haran until the death of his father Terah. Earlier Stephen was accused of blaspheming “*this place*” (Acts 6:13,14). Now he was trying to show the history of “*this land*.”

Acts 7:5 And he gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child.

Stephen continued the tactful part of his defense, looking like an angel, showing no sign of animosity, and not speaking dictatorially or as a teacher. Otherwise, he would have been stopped much sooner, and the sermon was long. At first, he just peacefully recounted the history of the Israelites, showing his knowledge of the Old Testament. His hearers could find no fault thus far, but they knew he was leading up to some point. He had been charged as a blasphemer of God and as a critic of and a nonbeliever in the Law, so He was proving that he was *in harmony* with the Law and that he *believed* the Old Testament.

Acts 7:6 And God spake on this wise, That his seed should sojourn in a strange land; and that they should bring them into bondage, and entreat them evil four hundred years.

Stephen quoted Genesis 15:13 about the Israelites’ being evilly entreated for 400 years. Ishmael’s antagonism toward Isaac marked the beginning of the 400 years. A 215-year period

expired before the Israelites entered Egypt, and then the Israelites resided in Egypt for another 215 years. Thus a total of 430 years elapsed from the time of Abraham's entrance into the Holy Land until the Exodus. Since Ishmael was not born immediately, only 400 years were mentioned here.

Acts 7:7 And the nation to whom they shall be in bondage will I judge, said God: and after that shall they come forth, and serve me in this place.

Egypt was judged with the ten plagues and the many deaths in the Red Sea at the time of the Exodus. Afterwards the Israelites came forth to serve God "in *this* place." Again Stephen emphasized the Holy Land (Acts 7:4). In a masterful way, Stephen was bringing the listening Jews up to the year AD 33, the present year.

Acts 7:8 And he gave him the covenant of circumcision: and so Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs.

Stephen showed his knowledge was as thorough as that of any who were judging him.

Acts 7:9 And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him,

Acts 7:10 And delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house.

In showing that he had a complete grasp of the Old Testament, Stephen continued to undercut the charge that he was a blasphemer and that he was against Moses and the Law. Because of envy, "the patriarchs," that is, Joseph's brethren, sold him into slavery. That comment disturbed those who were now judging Stephen, for they were the current "patriarchs," as it were, and they were also moved with envy. With Jesus' persecutors, who were the religious leadership of the nation, envy was a motive too. However, Stephen's tactfulness and subtlety kept the Jews from stopping him.

Acts 7:11 Now there came a dearth over all the land of Egypt and Chanaan, and great affliction: and our fathers found no sustenance.

Acts 7:12 But when Jacob heard that there was corn in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first.

Acts 7:13 And at the second time Joseph was made known to his brethren; and Joseph's kindred was made known unto Pharaoh.

From a prophetic standpoint, the "second time" corresponds to the Second Advent, when the antitypical Joseph will disclose his identity to Israel, his Hebrew brethren. What inspired testimony!

Acts 7:14 Then sent Joseph, and called his father Jacob to him, and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls.

Acts 7:15 So Jacob went down into Egypt, and died, he, and our fathers,

Acts 7:16 And were carried over into Sychem, and laid in the sepulchre that Abraham bought for a sum of money of the sons of Emmor the father of Sychem.

Q: Verse 14 states that Jacob and kindred, whom Joseph called to come to Egypt in the famine, totaled 75 souls. How do we harmonize this figure with Genesis 46:26,27, which states, "All the

souls that came with Jacob into Egypt, ... besides Jacob's sons' wives, ... were threescore and six; And the sons of Joseph, which were born ... in Egypt, were two souls: all the souls of the house of Jacob, which came into Egypt, were threescore and ten”?

A: The difference can be easily reconciled, but doing so takes time. Since we harmonized the figures in the Genesis study, we will not take time now.

Jacob and Leah were buried in Hebron with Abraham and Isaac and their wives, but Joseph's bones—actually his embalmed body—were transported out of Egypt in the Exodus to Shechem (Nablus) in northern Israel.

Acts 7:17 But when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt,

Acts 7:18 Till another king arose, which knew not Joseph.

The “time of promise” was the end of the 400 years. The 70 males who entered Egypt mushroomed into 2 million people in just 215 years. As the time of the Exodus drew near, “another king arose, which knew not Joseph.”

Acts 7:19 The same dealt subtly with our kindred, and evil entreated our fathers, so that they cast out their young children, to the end they might not live.

Acts 7:20 In which time Moses was born, and was exceeding fair, and nourished up in his father's house three months:

Acts 7:21 And when he was cast out, Pharaoh's daughter took him up, and nourished him for her own son.

Acts 7:22 And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds.

Stephen was still following an accurate, sequential historical line of reasoning, which his detractors could not fault. All the while, he showed that he had a thorough grasp of the wisdom of Scripture. He was on a level with the learned men who had gone to rabbinical schools, yet he was supposed to be a blasphemer.

Moses, who was born about 65 years after Joseph's death, was multi-talented and very capable. His learning occurred within the first 40 years of his life.

Comment: The following, from the *Expanded Biblical Comments*, summarizes some *Reprint* information about the astounding breadth of Moses' abilities.

“**Moses was learned**—[He was] educated at the University of Heliopolis, where he had access to 20,000 books. He learned arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, medicine and music. His long experience in the Egyptian court gave him insight into the affairs of government. God's providence prepared this suitable person as the prototype of Messiah.

“**In words and in deeds**—Tradition says that he was also an able general in the Egyptian army, [having] ... defeated with great slaughter the Ethiopian army which invaded Egypt in his early manhood. A great and powerful genius, an organizing, constructing mind [were his]. He invented boats, engines for building, instruments for war, hydraulics, hieroglyphics, [and] division of lands. [He was] a lawmaker, organizer, general, historian, poet, orator, and a saint who walked with God. The laws given through him have been the foundation for the laws of

all civilized nations.”

Reply: Scriptural clues, tradition, and old Egyptian writings preserved by the historian Josephus substantiate these facts.

Acts 7:23 And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel.

Acts 7:24 And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian:

Acts 7:25 For he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not.

Stephen gave his interpretation, saying Moses realized that his rearing in the court of Pharaoh was providential in connection with the deliverance of the Israelites.

Comment: Stephen commended Moses’ defense of the mistreated Israelite as a good thing—as an act of faith and courage.

Reply: Yes, in this patriotic act of defending an Israelite and slaying an Egyptian, Moses jeopardized his whole career, life, and standing in Egypt. He realized his position before the nation, but the Israelites did not. Prejudice caused them to improperly interpret his act.

Moses was a “full forty years old” before he acted. The number “40” usually signifies a period of testing. In talking about Moses, Stephen mentioned “forty years” four times (verses 23, 30, 36, and 42).

Acts 7:26 And the next day he showed himself unto them as they strove, and would have set them at one again, saying, Sirs, ye are brethren; why do ye wrong one to another?

Acts 7:27 But he that did his neighbour wrong thrust him away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us?

Acts 7:28 Wilt thou kill me, as thou diddest the Egyptian yesterday?

The *very next day* Moses tried to arbitrate a dispute between two Israelites. He was not trying to hide but showed himself openly to his people. The two consecutive incidents were providential, occurring just after Moses reached age 40. However, the Israelites, who were not in the attitude of looking for a deliverer, asked him, “Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us?”

Comment: Stephen’s purpose in showing the Israelites’ rejection of Joseph, Moses, and the prophets was to lead up to their rejection of Jesus.

Reply: Yes, and it took time for the listening Jews to realize what he was doing. The historical narration ended with a rebuke of the leaders.

Acts 7:29 Then fled Moses at this saying, and was a stranger in the land of Madian, where he begat two sons.

Acts 7:30 And when forty years were expired, there appeared to him in the wilderness of mount Sina an angel of the Lord in a flame of fire in a bush.

Acts 7:31 When Moses saw it, he wondered at the sight: and as he drew near to behold it, the voice of the Lord came unto him,

Madian is Midian. Moses' two sons were Gershom and Eliezer (1 Chron. 23:15). Moses spent the second 40 years of his life in the Wilderness of Sinai, and the years must have been long ones for him. He was now 80 years old.

The “angel of the Lord” and the “voice of the Lord” both refer to the *Logos*, the *Word of God*, who represented Jehovah. Exodus 3:2 says “the angel of the LORD” (all caps). Jesus was not Jehovah but merely an (arch)angel speaking on His behalf.

Acts 7:32 Saying, I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Then Moses trembled, and durst not behold.

Acts 7:33 Then said the Lord to him, Put off thy shoes from thy feet: for the place where thou standest is holy ground.

Acts 7:34 I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people which is in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send thee into Egypt.

When the “voice” said, “I am the God of thy fathers, [that is,] the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob,” Moses trembled and looked down at the ground. Then he was instructed to remove his shoes, for the place where he stood was holy ground.

Comment: The Father personalized the account: “I have seen.” “I have heard.” “I ... am come down to deliver them.” “I will send *thee* into Egypt.”

Reply: The words “I ... am come down to deliver them” made the deliverance seem *imminent*.

Acts 7:35 This Moses whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge? the same did God send to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the angel which appeared to him in the bush.

Acts 7:36 He brought them out, after that he had shown wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red sea, and in the wilderness forty years.

Acts 7:37 This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear.

Stephen rubbed in the fact that “*This Moses whom they [the Israelites] refused*” was to be their ruler and deliverer. Moses brought them out with “wonders and signs in the land of Egypt [the plagues], and in the [opening of the] Red sea, and in the wilderness.” The years in the wilderness were another 40-year testing period. Moses predicted that of the Israelites, God would raise up a prophet like unto him, namely, Jesus.

Comment: God sent Moses “to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the angel [the Logos] which appeared to him in the bush.”

Reply: It took a great deal of courage for Moses to appear before Pharaoh and give a strong message.

Acts 7:38 This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us:

Acts 7:39 To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt,

Acts 7:40 Saying unto Aaron, Make us gods to go before us: for as for this Moses, which brought us out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him.

Moses was “in the church [congregation] in the wilderness.” God spoke to him on Mount Sinai through “the angel,” the *Logos*. Stephen emphasized that the fathers would not obey Moses, for “in their hearts [they] turned back again into Egypt.” Their disobedience was a picture of those Christians who do not obey Jesus after consecrating. Their consecration is short-lived, and they go back into the world.

Comment: The term “lively oracles” reminds us of Peter’s words after Jesus’ resurrection: God has “begotten us again unto a lively [living] hope” (1 Pet. 1:3). The Law was thus being called the *living* Word.

Acts 7:41 And they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands.

Acts 7:42 Then God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, O ye house of Israel, have ye offered to me slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years in the wilderness?

Acts 7:43 Yea, ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, figures which ye made to worship them: and I will carry you away beyond Babylon.

The golden calf, a product of their *own* hands, pictures Papacy. Stephen quoted from the Book of Amos: “Have ye offered unto me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel? But ye have borne the tabernacle of your Moloch and Chiun your images, the star of your god, which ye made to yourselves. Therefore will I cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus, saith the LORD, whose name is The God of hosts” (Amos 5:25-27). Back there the Israelites worshipped idols in their private homes, much as many Roman Catholics do today.

Acts 7:44 Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as he had appointed, speaking unto Moses, that he should make it according to the fashion that he had seen.

Acts 7:45 Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Jesus into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drave out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David;

Acts 7:46 Who found favour before God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob.

“Jesus” should be Joshua, who desired to find a resting place for the Tabernacle.

Acts 7:47 But Solomon built him an house.

Acts 7:48 Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet,

Acts 7:49 Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest?

Acts 7:50 Hath not my hand made all these things?

Stephen continued to show, in a consecutive fashion, his thorough knowledge of Israel's history.

Acts 7:51 Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.

Acts 7:52 Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers:

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

Stephen's conclusion, which he had been leading up to, was an abrupt change. The Israelites of old were indifferent to the prophets and persecuted them, and the current generation was the same. Stephen used strong words of rebuke, calling these Jews "*stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears.*" Of course the "Just One" was Jesus. Stephen was speaking so powerfully now that it is amazing the religious leaders let him continue.

The Mosaic Law was received by the disposition of *literal* angels. Galatians 3:19 confirms that the Law was "ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator." Literal angels were involved in Moses' receiving the Law Covenant. And the Logos was involved in Moses' getting instructions from God.

Acts 7:54 When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth.

Acts 7:55 But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God,

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

Comment: Acts 2:37 said the people were "pricked in their heart," but there the result was favorable: *repentance*.

Reply: Yes, here the reaction was a *hardening* of the heart. The Jews "were cut to the heart, and gnashed on him [Stephen] with their teeth." There are two kinds of gnashing of the teeth in the Scriptures: (1) disappointment and/or chagrin and (2) anger. Here the Jews were angry.

Comment: The Greek word translated "pricked" in Acts 2:37 means "to stab" or "to be pierced thoroughly." Hence there was a *thorough excision of the heart* both with Peter's words earlier and now with Stephen's words here, as indicated by the expression "cut to the heart" in verse 54. In one case, the excision of the heart was for good, and in the other case, it was for bad.

After Stephen saw that the hearers were not receptive to his words of truth, he looked up to heaven and had the unusual experience of seeing a *vision* of God and Jesus. The vision increased the angelic look on Stephen's face, thus making an even more powerful witness against his accusers, including Saul (verse 58). Saul was prejudiced at the time but could reflect back on Stephen's words and demeanor later. God rewarded Stephen for his boldness, which was a needed lesson for the others. Stephen was bold before the *elders* of Israel, who were venerated for their wisdom and schooling.

Jesus' death was a *victory*, for he was now on the right hand of God as a reward for his faithfulness. Like the Apostle Paul later, Stephen gave a *long* and learned discourse.

Acts 7:57 Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord,

Acts 7:58 And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul.

Acts 7:59 And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

Acts 7:60 And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

The stoning of Stephen took place outside the city walls on Golgotha, where Jesus had been crucified. The signification of being put to death outside the city was that the individual was accursed and apart from God and the holy city. The custom was to first push the person off Golgotha hill and then dispatch (kill) the fallen victim with stones.

Comment: Verse 58 shows that Saul had a leadership position.

Reply: Yes, his learning and position were respected. And after this incident, he was given *great authority*.

Q: Why did the stoners shed their outer garments and lay them down at Saul's feet?

A: Without these garments, they would be unencumbered in stoning Stephen. Also, the act showed their respect for Saul.

Comment: Imagine stoning a man who was in prayer posture!

Notice that Stephen "fell asleep"; that is, he did not go to heaven at that time, even though this incident occurred in New Testament times and *after* Jesus' resurrection. The Old Testament records that both good and evil ones fell asleep in death. Some in the evangelistic churches disparagingly use the term "soul sleepers" for those who believe in death as a sleep, yet both the New and the Old Testaments teach this concept. Out of their own mouths, these professed Christians show their lack of familiarity with what the Scriptures teach on the condition of death.

What a long—and learned—discourse Stephen gave before his judges! His qualifications were similar to those of Paul, yet he was only a deacon.

Q: Stephen's words, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge," sound like the *spurious* words of Jesus in Luke 23:34. Shouldn't the sin, at least to the extent that it was willful, have been laid to their charge?

A: Yes. However, Moses said (paraphrased), "Expunge me if that will bring the salvation of Israel" (Exod. 32:31,32). Stephen's sentiments were good, but the persecutors were responsible for their willful sins. In fact, Paul was stoned as retribution for consenting to the stoning of Stephen (2 Cor. 11:25). When any of the consecrated commit willful sins against the Holy Spirit, they must be requited now, in the present life. With the world of mankind, the retribution can be later, that is, in the Kingdom.

In verse 59, the word “God” is supplied and should be deleted. The thought is, “And they stoned Stephen, as he was calling and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”

Acts 8:1 And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.

Acts 8:2 And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.

Acts 8:3 As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.

Saul consented to the stoning of Stephen. Having been trained under the Law, he probably felt duty-bound to do so. He considered his defense of God to be just and righteous, and he did not see that his actions were a perversion of reason.

Comment: Saul’s conversion occurred within a year after Jesus’ death. The tremendous outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the early Church and their oneness of spirit, as well as the “great persecution” that followed, also took place in the *same year*.

Reply: Yes, opposite experiences were compacted into that first year—from elation and a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit to immediate and intense persecution, of which Stephen was the first martyr. He was very zealous but was cut off in death shortly after getting the Holy Spirit. No doubt he had had Old Testament training before his Spirit begettal.

In witnessing the zeal and boldness of Stephen, Paul would have reasoned that if Stephen was an example of a believer, then believers were dangerous. Saul felt he had to contain the Christian movement lest the Jewish priesthood be overthrown. He was an example of one who has the right *motive* of wanting to serve God but lacks *understanding*. When he did accept Christ, he left *everything* to follow in his steps.

Providence protected the apostles there in Jerusalem, whereas other disciples (“the church”) were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Saul entered homes to hale (pull out) men and women and remand them to prison, persecution, and death. The apostles were miraculously spared because they were meant to be foundation stones and had a ministry to perform.

Saul was a Jew but evidently had obtained Roman citizenship through his father, who had a large estate and was very wealthy. Paul was “free born” through the purchase of Roman citizenship at great expense before he became a Christian (Acts 22:28). Later in his life, he was providentially sent to Rome as a Roman citizen.

Acts 8:4 Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.

Acts 8:5 Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.

Acts 8:6 And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.

Acts 8:7 For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed.

Acts 8:8 And there was great joy in that city.

Philip (not the apostle) did many miracles in Samaria, where the woman at the well was from

(John 4:5-7). Jesus had told his disciples to preach (1) in Jerusalem and Judea, (2) in Samaria, and (3) to the Gentiles. The persecution providentially directed the spread of the gospel by displacing the disciples from their homes, disrupting the communal arrangement, and stopping the holding of all goods in common. However, the disciples were *zealous*, not despondent, for they were rewarded by being able to preach the gospel and do many miracles. The Samaritans, being a *mixture* of Jew and Gentile, were considered half-breeds, and soon would come the incident with the Ethiopian eunuch, a *proselyte*. But Cornelius would be the first *Gentile convert* in the *full* sense of the word, and that would not occur until AD 36, three years hence.

Acts 8:9 But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one:

Acts 8:10 To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God.

Acts 8:11 And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries.

Acts 8:12 But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

Acts 8:13 Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.

Philip's miracles *far exceeded* what Simon had been doing through witchcraft. When Simon recognized this fact, he believed and went through the motions of being baptized. "Simony," which was derived from this Simon, was the practice of the Roman Catholic Church to grant bishoprics *for money* to mere professed believers who were really unregenerate. For many thousands of dollars, the pope assigned a territory over which an individual would have religious jurisdiction and authority. The purchase had nothing to do with the Holy Spirit or the manifestation of zeal for God and truth.

Acts 8:14 Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John:

Acts 8:15 Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost:

Acts 8:16 (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.)

Acts 8:17 Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.

Verse 16 should have the pronoun "it" for the Holy Spirit. After Philip did wonderful miracles, the believers were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. However, they did not receive the Holy Spirit until the apostles came, for despite all of the miracles, Philip could not confer the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the apostles Peter and John were sent from Jerusalem to Samaria for this purpose, and when they laid their hands on the newly consecrated ones, immediately the Holy Spirit was received. Back there the receiving of a mechanical gift was viewed as a bona fide assurance of one's acceptance.

There were many intricacies in how these baptisms took place in the early Church: the kind of baptism, who received the baptism, etc. This subject has been very little explored, and even the general rules have exceptions.

Acts 8:18 And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money,

Acts 8:19 Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.

Acts 8:20 But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money.

Acts 8:21 Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God.

Acts 8:22 Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.

Acts 8:23 For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.

Simon wanted to *purchase* the power to convey the Holy Spirit to others by the laying on of hands. In other words, he wanted to duplicate what the apostles could do. In condemning this desire of Simon, Peter was again the leading spokesman. Peter told him to repent of his evil heart condition, saying (paraphrased), "Pray to God that *perhaps* the evil thought of your heart will be forgiven." Notice that the forgiveness had to come *from God*. Although we can forgive some sins, other sins are the prerogative of God. Repentance and the retracing of wrong steps are the *minimum* requirement for blessing and forgiveness, but forgiveness is up to God.

Comment: Actually, Peter was being merciful to expose the sin so that Simon could ask for prayer and forgiveness.

Reply: Yes, and Peter spoke *strong* words, saying that Simon was "in the *gall of bitterness*, and in the *bond of iniquity*." The taste of bile is very bitter. Bile is one of the first things to be removed from the carcass of an animal that is to be cooked. Otherwise, it would poison the food. The point is that *strong* talk is necessary when *strong* steps have to be taken for reconciliation to God.

Generally speaking, only the apostles could confer the Holy Spirit, but there were exceptions. This ability helped to distinguish between the service of apostles and that of the brotherhood whether or not an individual was an elder. For example, *apostolic* doctrinal statements and teachings were infallible. Simon was asking for *apostolic* power.

Acts 8:24 Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me.

Acts 8:25 And they, when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.

It is favorable that Simon recognized the authority of Peter and John and asked for their prayers. Simon felt that if he was in the gall of bitterness, he was in no condition to pray for himself and he needed the prayers of the apostles. By Peter's not saying that Simon was healed, the others were left with a fear of pursuing such a course. Otherwise, some would have taken the approach or attitude, "Sin now and ask for forgiveness later."

Brethren often do not recognize the superiority of another. Some are not able to appreciate the motive(s) of one who is on a higher level, yet a humble person would give credit based on

Jesus' statement "If you do not believe me, believe my works" (John 10:38 paraphrase). Even if one's actions are not understood, wisdom would say to believe the brother for his works. *Humility* can admit to a higher motive even if the act is not understood, and *humility and faith* can bridge understanding and thus accept things on a higher level. Of course when the 144,000 are revealed, a lot of questions will be answered. *God's will and decision* will stop all mouths at that time.

Acts 8:26 And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert.

An angel told Philip the evangelist to go "toward the south" and not to a specific destination. Philip was to get on the main road that went from Jerusalem to Egypt by way of Gaza. Thus Philip knew where to go but did not know what to expect. It was a simple direction of obedience. As both a city and a locality, Gaza was the last outlying district before entering Egypt. Just to clarify: Philip was not told to go to Gaza but to go south and get on the road that led to Gaza.

Acts 8:27 And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship,

Philip obeyed. The Ethiopian eunuch had just finished a mission to go to Jerusalem to worship. Now he was returning home to Ethiopia, but he was still in Israel at this point. He was probably a proselyte to the Jewish faith, as was Ruth the Moabitess. The eunuch had to be a "Jew" in some respect because the gospel was not opened to the Gentiles until AD 36, the end of the 70 weeks' prophecy, which began in 454 BC, the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes. Coming from Ethiopia, he would have been black.

Since the eunuch had charge of all the treasure of the queen and was a man "of great authority," it speaks well for the queen that she permitted him to leave for a period of time. Ethiopia was at least 500 miles from Jerusalem, so this was quite a trip, even by chariot. Since there were several Candaces, we do not know which one this was. "Candace" is probably a female title like "Cleopatra."

In that day, Ethiopia was considered the outpost of civilization in land travel. The Queen of Sheba "came from the uttermost parts of the earth [a comparable distance] to hear the wisdom of Solomon," but she came by boat to Eilat and then traveled by land (Matt. 12:42).

Acts 8:28 Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet.

The eunuch was sitting in his chariot and reading Isaiah *aloud*.

Q: How did the eunuch get a copy of Isaiah when scrolls were kept in the Temple?

A: To be in charge of the queen's treasury meant that he was a man of wealth, as well as a man of great authority, so although scrolls were scarce, it was possible to purchase one at considerable cost. For the common man, scrolls were available only in the synagogue.

Comment: What *zeal and intense interest* he showed to travel more than 500 miles and then go to a lot of effort to find a scroll to purchase for a large sum of money!

Reply: Although he would not have come annually to worship, it had probably been on his heart to worship at Jerusalem for some time, and this was the year for the journey. The fact he had a chariot confirms both his wealth and his authority.

Acts 8:29 Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.

Acts 8:30 And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest?

Philip was told by the Holy Spirit to go near the eunuch's chariot and "join" himself to it. Whether the Spirit spoke mechanically in his inner ear or whether he felt compelled by the Spirit to go to the chariot, we do not know, but the latter may have happened. At any rate, he sensed that the incident about to unfold was the object of his being sent "toward the south."

"Philip ran thither" to the eunuch and the chariot. This bit of information tells us that the chariot was *moving* and that it had passed Philip. He probably did not pay much attention to the chariot when it first passed him, and although he may have heard the eunuch reading, the words were not intelligible. But then he put certain pieces together and realized how unusual the situation was. After a delayed reaction, he sensed that he should run after the chariot, which was now going in the opposite direction. After his baptism, Jesus was similarly compelled, and thus he went into the wilderness to fast, meditate, pray, and study. The Holy Spirit sometimes "speaks" through impulse or emotion.

Comment: When Philip was first told to go south to the main road between Jerusalem and Egypt, he was probably very alert, watching to ascertain the reason for his being sent there. Subsequently he may have daydreamed or had a lapse of concentration. Then, when the Spirit spoke to him, the situation registered, and he ran after the chariot.

Reply: Philip would have run abreast of the chariot at first and been able to distinguish the words the eunuch was reading aloud from the Book of Isaiah. A natural question under the circumstances was, "Do you understand what you are reading?" No doubt an expression or smile on Philip's face was conducive to continuing the conversation.

Acts 8:31 And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him.

The eunuch gave a humble answer: "How can I, except some man should guide me?" What an open invitation to Philip! The eunuch then asked Philip to come up into the chariot and sit with him. Having been reading aloud, the eunuch sensed from Philip's question that this stranger could explain Isaiah 53:7,8. Obviously, the eunuch was struggling to understand, and the bumpy chariot ride made the reading even more difficult. Hence he was very intense in his desire to understand.

Acts 8:32 The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth:

Acts 8:33 In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth.

Most Jews knew Greek and Hebrew, so the eunuch was probably reading from the Septuagint, which Philip understood. Under this providential setting, Philip seized on the moment as a wonderful opportunity to say the Isaiah text was speaking about Jesus.

We will take a moment to discuss part of the paraphrased quote from Isaiah 53:8, "In his [Jesus'] humiliation his judgment was taken away." What is the thought of "judgment" in this context? Although Jesus was the Son of God, he did not exercise power to save himself. He did not call on angels to save him but humbled himself and willingly submitted "unto death, even

the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:7,8). Jesus’ role of humiliation is that he was meek and did not try to defend himself or finagle himself out of being crucified. Earlier he boldly and loudly defended himself and his doctrine to the masses. During his ministry, he was without fear and bold like a lion, but the day or two before his death, there was a radical and sudden change in Jesus’ demeanor. He submitted willingly to humiliation in his death on the Cross. In his “judgment [right to life],” he was falsely condemned, two false witnesses with trumped-up charges having testified against him. “Who shall declare his generation [offspring]? for his life [and seed] is taken from the earth.” When Jesus died, he left no offspring. He was unmarried and had no children—and hence no posterity. Therefore, his “life” and seed were taken from the earth.

Acts 8:34 And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?

The eunuch asked of whom Isaiah was speaking. Sensing that Philip knew something, the eunuch was desirous for any clue that would assist him in his understanding. He wanted to know, “Was the Prophet Isaiah speaking of his own experience or of another personage?”

Acts 8:35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.

Philip had said nothing more until now. At this point, he “opened his mouth, and began [to speak],” starting with the Isaiah text and then going to many other Scriptures to preach Jesus and to show how they were fulfilled in the personage of Christ. The explanation would have taken some time, and we know that the eunuch was receiving the words with joy because of what happened subsequently.

Acts 8:36 And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?

The chariot was still moving as Philip and the eunuch came in sight of water. The eunuch immediately suggested that he be baptized: “See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?”

Comment: Obviously, Philip had covered much ground in witnessing for the eunuch to make such a comment.

Reply: Yes. In recounting why he believed Jesus was the true Messiah, Philip must have brought in the subject of water baptism. What an ideal situation! The candidate saw the water and asked for and desired consecration and baptism without being urged or pressured by others. Apparently, Philip had preached a very powerful and complete yet simple sermon. The eunuch, a man of *great* authority, was meek (teachable) and humble.

Acts 8:37 And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

Although this verse is probably spurious, the Revised Standard Version says that some ancient manuscripts include all or some of it. Nevertheless, the comments are appropriate.

Acts 8:38 And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.

The eunuch commanded the chariot to stop, and Philip baptized him in the water. Perhaps the water was in a wadi, which the Lord would have filled through a rainstorm. The eunuch had

not come alone in the chariot, for he commanded other(s) to stop the vehicle. Obviously, he had servants and was not driving the chariot himself.

Q: Philip was not an apostle, and the eunuch was going back to Ethiopia where there were no apostles. Therefore, did the eunuch receive the Holy Spirit from the evangelist?

A: It would seem so, but the account does not so state. Some Scriptures later in the Book of Acts give us leeway to surmise that the eunuch did receive the Holy Spirit. Although it was rare for one to receive the Holy Spirit without an apostle being present, exceptions did occur. This Philip was the same individual (the evangelist, not the apostle) as in Acts 6:5; 8:5; and 21:8.

Acts 8:39 And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.

Acts 8:40 But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea.

After the eunuch's baptism, the Spirit of the Lord translated Philip to Azotus, which was 30 to 40 miles away. The eunuch went on his way rejoicing because he thought he had seen an angel. This experience would have lasted him a lifetime. In returning home, the eunuch went to Gaza and then into Egypt and up the Nile to Ethiopia, which was a great distance of 500 to 600 miles from Jerusalem.

From Azotus (Ashdod?) to Caesarea, Philip testified and witnessed in all the cities about this experience. Incidentally, Elijah and Enoch were also translated.

Acts 9:1 And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest,

Acts 9:2 And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.

Remember, this is still the *first* year following Jesus' crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. *Many* things were happening.

The last mention of Saul was in connection with witnessing the death of Stephen. From his prejudiced standpoint, Saul could not recognize the saintly character of Stephen, even though he heard the long, bold sermon to the priesthood and the authorities and witnessed the stoning and Stephen's kneeling down with a radiant face. Saul thought Christianity was a false religion, and although he could see that stamping it out would be very difficult, he felt that something had to be done to stop those who, like Stephen, spoke so boldly and so confidently and were willing to die in a resigned fashion for their beliefs. Feeling a personal responsibility to do everything in his power to stop this new interpretation of the Old Testament Scriptures, he got letters (plural) of authority from the high priest. This meant that the high priest wrote to the one in charge of each synagogue Saul would be visiting en route to Damascus, his destination. Saul intended to arrest women as well as men and bring them back, bound, to Jerusalem. With zeal and fury, he thought *their boldness* had to be stamped out *with boldness*, and he felt he had to let others know so that Christianity would be nipped in the bud before it went like a forest fire. In fact, Saul was so intent on seizing Christians that he was "breathing out threatenings and slaughter," meaning that not only his words but also his visual expression and attitude manifested his intention. We can see the intensity of his opposition to the gospel.

Acts 9:3 And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven:

Acts 9:4 And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

As Saul was approaching Damascus, a bright light from heaven suddenly shone around him, and he heard a voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" When we compare the three accounts of Saul's conversion in the Book of Acts, we find seeming contradictions that need to be explained (Acts 9:3-8; 22:6-11; 26:12-18).

Of the three accounts, Acts 9:7 says that those with Saul heard the voice, Acts 22:9 says that they did not hear the voice, and the last account does not state the matter either way. When the flash of light occurred, it was probably like lightning with thunder (sound) being involved. The thought is that those who accompanied Saul heard the thunder, but they could not understand the words of Jesus.

The word translated "voice" is the Greek *phone*. In most cases, *phone* does mean "voice," but it is also translated "sound." Let us consider three other Scriptures. The "sound of a millstone" that will be heard no more in Babylon is not an intelligible conversation, and neither is the "sound of many waters" (Rev. 1:15; 18:22). "For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?" (1 Cor. 14:8). The point is that those with Saul heard only a noise or a sound and not distinct words, whereas Saul heard Jesus' words *very clearly*. Chapters 9, 22, and 26 of the Book of Acts provide considerable detail on how the Lord commissioned Saul to be used in various ways, but first, he had to go to Damascus, where he would receive further instruction.

It was not the privilege of those who accompanied Saul to understand the message of Jesus. The message and experience were unique to Paul, as he tried to say later in his ministry when others questioned his apostleship for not having seen or heard Jesus during the First Advent. On different occasions, Paul had to defend himself and his ministry by calling attention to the fact that he was the only apostle to have seen the *glorified* Jesus.

The light was so bright that it had a blinding effect *at noontime*, and the net effect was that those with Saul were in a stupor, being astonished (astonished, like stone). Acts 9:4 and 22:7 state that Saul fell to the ground; Acts 26:14 says that all of them fell down. The account in Chapter 9 zeros in on the light about Saul, whereas the other two accounts state that the light also shone on those who accompanied him. There is no contradiction in the three accounts. All saw the light and all fell to the ground, but the accounts sometimes discuss only what happened to Saul.

"Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" Verse 4 is a proof text that persecuting the Lord's true people is like persecuting him. Jesus and the Father are sensitive to the persecution. Such little ones are like the apple of God's eye, meaning that just as we are sensitive to a speck of dust in our eye, so the Father is sensitive to the persecution of His true children (Psa. 17:8). Elsewhere, the Apostle Paul reasoned that anyone who demeans a true disciple of the Lord is in serious danger. And we should be especially careful not to demean a person's motive, unless the motive is very apparent by the nature of the act, which is usually not the case. For example, the intent is obvious in the case of premeditated murder.

Saul saw Jesus as one born before the due time (1 Cor. 15:8). Although this incident occurred at noon, the brightness of Jesus' glory as a divine being was so great that it not only blinded Saul but shone above the brightness of the noonday sun and seared, or burned, the surface of his eyes. Saul saw something but not the delineation of the risen Lord's features. Proof of the searing is that three days later scales fell off his eyes when his sight was partially restored. Moses' face shone with glory just by hearing and speaking with God (actually the Logos) on Mount Sinai and seeing an appearance. For Paul to have such an unusual experience shows he

was somewhat on a par with Moses.

Acts 9:5 And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.

The last clause, “it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks,” is spurious, but since this clause appears later in the Book of Acts, there is nothing wrong with its insertion here (Acts 26:14). “Pricks” are goads, or prods (sticks with a sharp point), that were used to guide oxen when plowing a field. If the oxen kicked the goads, they experienced *pain*. Jesus was saying that Saul’s conscience was affected, even though his heart was set on persecution. Therefore, these were “pricks” against his *conscience*.

Saul was so intent on persecution that God had to slap him down to wake him up. Incidentally, the old treatment for a nervous breakdown, in which the same thoughts keep repeating and repeating, was to use an electric shock. The treatment was so painful and startling that when the patient awoke, the troubling thoughts were gone. The inference here is that the Lord had been trying to get through to Saul for a while in various ways and finally resorted to a stronger method when Saul did not repent. Saul had seen Stephen’s face and composure and had heard his reasonable talk. No doubt there were other things as well, but Saul was so blinded with prejudice that shock treatment was needed to change his thinking. The persecution was so on his mind that he was even muttering it aloud in his fury (Acts 9:1).

Comment: The principle of Revelation 3:15,16 comes to mind where Jesus said, “I would rather have you *cold* or hot than lukewarm.” Saul was so zealous in his coldness that when his eyes were opened, he was very zealous for the gospel.

Reply: First, he was cold to the truth and hot in his zeal of misunderstanding. Then the situation reversed. He became cold to his former understanding and hot and zealous as a Christian.

Comment: Saul’s conversion is an example of the “Shimei” attitude of a segment of the Holy Remnant (Zech. 12:11-13). Those Jews may be vitriolic toward Jesus and his followers at present, but because God can see that their heart is right, He will open their eyes in Jacob’s Trouble to see the truth that Jesus is their Messiah.

Acts 9:6 And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.

Acts 9:7 And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.

The first part of verse 6 is spurious (“And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?”), but other accounts show that the thought is accurate. He certainly trembled and was astonished. The men with Saul also fell down, but even when they got to their feet, they were speechless like zombies. The experience shocked them into a trauma for 30 seconds or so while the Lord told Saul his responsibilities and instructed him what he should do (Acts 22:10; 26:16-18).

Acts 9:8 And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus.

Acts 9:9 And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.

When Saul arose, he was blind and had to be led. *For three days*, he did not eat or drink, for he

was extremely upset with himself for having murdered so many Christians. He now knew that Jesus was the true Messiah! Being a very intelligent person and requiring some substance for his belief, he subsequently went to the Scriptures with an unprejudiced mind to receive instruction to buttress his experience. And he would go even further, for he wanted to get as much information as possible—and as fast as possible—as we will find out later. No doubt Saul prayed a lot during the three days and nights.

Acts 9:10 And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord.

Jesus appeared in a vision to Ananias, who dwelled in Damascus. Ananias was “a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there [in Damascus]” (Acts 22:12). Because of his character, he was chosen by the Lord to have the honor of communicating with Saul.

Acts 9:11 And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth,

Ananias was told to go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and inquire there for Saul of Tarsus. Judas would have been well known as a local resident, so his house would not be difficult to find.

Comment: *Reprint* No. 4356 says that Straight Street was an aristocratic street. It was unusual for a street to be not only straight but also very wide—100 feet wide.

“For, behold, he prayeth.” Saul had been fasting and praying for three days and nights, and he was still in prayer at this time. This fact helped to allay the fears of Ananias, who was aware of Saul’s zealous persecutions of Christians.

Acts 9:12 And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight.

Ananias was told that preparation had already been made, for Saul, through prayer and a vision, had been informed that Ananias was approaching to restore his sight (partially). In other words, Saul’s prayer was answered by his being told that someone was on the way to help him. Proof that his eyesight was only partially restored is that others recorded his epistles, and the ones he wrote were done in *large* letters (Gal. 6:11).

Saul had been led by the hand to the house of Judas (verse 8), where he remained for three days. Since Saul was *totally* blind at this point, his blindness enhanced the vision that he saw out of *total* blackness.

Acts 9:13 Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem:

Acts 9:14 And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name.

Acts 9:15 But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:

Ananias was told that Saul was specially chosen to bear Jesus’ name before Gentiles, kings, and the Jews. This was quite a commission! The Apostle Peter was given the key to open the door to the Gentiles (namely, Cornelius), but the Apostle Paul had the ongoing commission. Of the two, Paul’s ministry was more extensive.

Comment: Ananias offered a *gentle* objection in verses 13 and 14 paraphrased thus: “Lord, I have heard from many how much evil Saul has done to your saints at Jerusalem, and now he has authority from the chief priests to seize all Christians.” Then, after one statement from the Lord, Ananias submitted *fully* to the Lord’s instruction.

Acts 9:16 For I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name’s sake.

Jesus said that because Saul had caused other Christians to suffer, he would have to suffer “great things” as retribution for past deeds. Because of circumstances, he later had to recount his sufferings, which included the following agonies: “... in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness” (2 Cor. 11:23-28).

Acts 9:17 And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.

Comment: The first words of Ananias to Saul were tender and comforting: “*Brother Saul.*”

Reply: “Saul” (the Hebrew form) is “Paul” in the Greek. Both names mean “little one.”

Comment: Only Jesus received the Spirit without measure, so for Saul to be “filled” with the Holy Spirit shows the depth and the sincerity of his consecration.

Reply: Paul was blessed *progressively* with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, but he had to suffer much. Note that he got the Holy Spirit when Ananias, who was *not an apostle*, put his hands on him. This case was an important exception to the general rule. Saul also received a partial restoration of his eyesight, which was his circumstance the rest of his life; that is, he had poor eyesight but was able to see with difficulty.

Acts 9:18 And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized.

The fact that scales fell from Saul’s eyes proves his eyes had been burned, or seared, by the bright light of the Lord’s glory. The crust flaked off, and he could see (partially).

Saul was baptized at this point. In the early Church, baptism usually *preceded* the begetting of the Holy Spirit. With Saul, however, baptism *followed* the receiving of the Holy Spirit. Here was another exception. With Cornelius also, baptism followed the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:44-48).

Q: Many have the thought that Paul received *John’s* baptism, but that would not be appropriate, especially after the Holy Spirit had been given. Also, Acts 22:16 states that he was told, “Be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name *of the Lord.*” It is true that sins were washed away, but that was done in “the name *of the Lord.*” Doesn’t Jesus’ baptism include the washing away of sins?

A: Yes, but that subject would be a whole talk. For now, we should just note these details in

Scripture. When Saul was fasting for three days, he was in a penitent mood, reflecting on Jesus' words, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." Nevertheless, Saul was expected to have the symbol of *water baptism* so that his sins would be figuratively *washed away*.

Acts 9:19 **And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus.**

To show a time lapse, a paragraph mark should have been inserted after the word "strengthened." The next verse would then read, "Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus." It is necessary to understand the time lapse in order to see that Paul became an apostle in AD 33, the *same year Jesus died*. This statement can be proven by using certain texts from the Book of Acts and the first chapter of Galatians (1:15-22).

Like Jesus, Paul fled to the wilderness after he was baptized. He went to "Arabia," that is, Sinai, for part of three years to meditate and pray. Then he returned to Damascus. In other words, Paul did not confer with the brethren after being baptized but was driven of the Spirit to the desert of Sinai to be in isolation. While there, he no doubt reviewed and reconciled how all of the prophecies were fulfilled in Jesus.

On his return from the wilderness, Paul remained at Damascus for a while, that is, until the authorities sought to kill him and the disciples let him down in a basket over the wall. Three years elapsed from the time of his conversion to this dramatic exit from Damascus. (He went from Damascus to Sinai, back to Damascus, and then to Jerusalem.) Acts Chapter 9 omits many details that Paul had to explain later in his Epistle to the Galatians because the disciples had gotten the wrong message and were criticizing him. For instance, when Paul got to Jerusalem after fleeing Damascus, he went to see James and Peter, and he stayed in Peter's home for 15 days (Gal. 1:18,19).

Acts 9:20 **And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.**

On Paul's return to Damascus, he "straightway preached Christ in the synagogues." There were many synagogues in the city, and he was very active—so much so that the Jews wanted to kill him (Acts 9:23). They even sealed the city, trying to prevent his escape.

Jesus began his ministry after only 40 days and 40 nights in the wilderness, but being a perfect man and having a preexistence, he was far, far ahead of Paul. Having been mistaught, Paul required much of a three-year period in the wilderness. It is difficult to discard or change thinking when one is cultured under another doctrine.

The three years are important in proving that Paul's conversion took place in AD 33. Since Cornelius was not converted yet (see Acts Chapter 10) and would not be converted until the year AD 36, and since three years elapsed while Paul was in Damascus and Sinai before the first Gentile conversion, we know that Paul was baptized in AD 33.

Our calculation of AD 36 is based on the 70 weeks' prophecy of Daniel Chapter 9. Jesus was cut off in the midst of the seventieth week, or 3 1/2 years before the expiration of the 490 years beginning in 454 BC. With the expiration, the Jews no longer had exclusive favor, and the gospel was opened to the Gentiles.

Acts 9:21 **But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?**

Acts 9:22 **But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at**

Damascus, proving that this is very Christ.

Paul proved to the Jews that Jesus was “very Christ” (the Messiah, the Anointed) by using Old Testament prophecies and Scriptures and showing that he was the fulfillment. Paul *personally* realized that Jesus was the Messiah when Jesus appeared to him initially, but now he used Old Testament reasoning with the Jews.

In later epistles, Paul tried to explain his background and conversion and early experiences in becoming a Christian, but the brethren had difficulty accepting his explanation. That is why Paul said, “I do not lie!” (Gal. 1:20). He had gone to Arabia (Sinai) following his conversion, so his conversion had to occur in AD 33. However, the brethren did not become aware of his conversion until *after he had returned from Sinai*, so his conversion seemed much later to them. Moreover, there was a communication problem between Damascus and Jerusalem. A wall existed with the civil power and commerce, and even with the brethren to some extent. There was enmity because Herod was the chief influence in Jerusalem and the adultery of Herodias affected her relatives in Damascus. Thus a rift developed between the Syrian house and the Herodian house, Damascus and Jerusalem being the centers, respectively.

Verse 21 throws a little light on what Ananias said earlier: “We heard that you have a permit to persecute us here in Damascus” (Acts 19:13,14 paraphrase). Saul had letters of intent and authority from the chief priest to hale into prison and persecute unto death those who, in his judgment, were part of the Christian cult. Evidently, that news preceded Saul’s arrival in Damascus.

Notice that the more Paul was opposed, the stronger he got in the Lord. He met every challenge head-on, proving that Jesus was Messiah. What a wonderful commendation!

Comment: The term “very Christ” is Scriptural. However, Trinitarians use the expression “very God,” and there is no such term in the Bible.

Reply: Yes. A similar expression is in the Nicene Creed.

Acts 9:23 And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him:

Acts 9:24 But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him.

Acts 9:25 Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket.

Damascus was sealed for several days and nights in an effort to apprehend Paul, but one night the disciples put Paul in a basket and lowered him down over the wall. Obviously, a Christian household was on or against the wall but between gates to facilitate the escape. By going up on the roof, the disciples could walk right over to the wall and look down. Since the wall was too high for Paul to jump, the disciples effectively let him down in a basket on a rope.

Just as the Lord providentially had the sycamore tree planted years in advance for Zacchaeus to climb, so the Lord arranged in advance that the home of one who would become a Christian was against the wall so that Paul could escape. The account of Rahab and the two Israelite spies is similar in this respect, for her house was also “upon the town wall” (Josh. 2:15).

Acts 9:26 And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.

When Paul got to Jerusalem, the disciples were afraid of him. The fact they did not believe he

was a disciple proves there was not much communication between Damascus and Jerusalem. The testimony of Ananias had carried weight in Damascus, for God had chosen him as a devout and outstanding man. Moreover, Paul's sincerity was manifested by his zealous reasoning in the synagogues about Jesus' being the Messiah. But Jerusalem lacked these proofs, and because Paul was unknown except as Saul the persecutor, he was feared as a spy.

Acts 9:27 But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.

In Jerusalem, Barnabas vouchsafed for Paul. The Scriptures do not say how Barnabas got this information, but apparently, he was a man of means and, as a traveler, may have seen Paul in Damascus.

Acts 9:28 And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem.

Acts 9:29 And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him.

The "coming in and going out at Jerusalem" was probably during the 15 days that Paul abode with Peter, and Paul also saw James, the Lord's brother (Gal. 1:18,19). Paul was so active and zealous during the 15 days that the Grecian (Hellenist) Jews wanted to slay him. He could dispute with them on their own terms and refute their reasoning.

Like Paul, many are zealous when they first get the truth, but unlike Paul, their zeal diminishes in time. Paul's zeal continued for his whole life.

Acts 9:30 Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus.

Because of the persecution threat, the brethren escorted Paul to Caesarea and then sent him on to Tarsus, Paul's hometown. The implication is that Paul left Caesarea by boat.

Acts 9:31 Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.

The great persecution in Israel now ceased. Two contributing factors, occurring about the same time, were that the Emperor Caligula was no longer ordering persecutions and that Paul had stopped preaching in Israel. A considerable period of peace followed, and the Church multiplied. The regions affected—Judea, Galilee, and Samaria—were all in Israel.

Acts 9:32 And it came to pass, as Peter passed throughout all quarters, he came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda.

Acts 9:33 And there he found a certain man named Aeneas, which had kept his bed eight years, and was sick of the palsy.

Acts 9:34 And Peter said unto him, Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and make thy bed. And he arose immediately.

Acts 9:35 And all that dwelt at Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord.

This one event—Peter's healing of Aeneas—led "all" in Lydda and Saron to consecrate.

Presumably Aeneas was a believer or had some faith for Peter, out of the blue, to heal him of a steadily deteriorating sickness. Peter told Aeneas not only to “arise” but also to “make [straighten out] thy bed.”

Acts 9:36 Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did.

Acts 9:37 And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died: whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber.

Acts 9:38 And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them.

Joppa is Jaffa today. That Dorcas was “full of good works and almsdeeds” is a fine commendation. The names Dorcas (Greek) and Tabitha (Hebrew) both mean “beautiful” and “gazelle.” The double name was like Cephas and Peter, Silas and Silvanus, Timothy and Timotheus, Saul and Paul, etc. Dorcas died and was laid in an upper chamber.

Comment: The account does not say that the disciples expected Peter to raise Dorcas from death. They may have wanted Peter there for his leadership qualities and consolation and to conduct a funeral service.

Reply: Yes, and this is the first case where an apostle raised one from the dead.

Acts 9:39 Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and showing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them.

Acts 9:40 But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up.

Acts 9:41 And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive.

The weeping widows showed Peter the garments and coats that Dorcas had made for them by hand. Making these heavy garments for the brethren was a nice service.

“Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning ... to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up.” Then he lifted her up further to a standing position and brought her out to those who were grieving. What a dramatic scene to behold! This resuscitation was similar to the raising of Jairus’s daughter (Mark 5:22-24,35-42). Peter took an example of a miracle from Jesus.

Acts 9:42 And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord.

Acts 9:43 And it came to pass, that he tarried many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner.

As with the raising of Lazarus, this miracle helped to spread the gospel. Tabitha’s resuscitation led many in Joppa to believe. Peter remained in Joppa for many days, staying with Simon the tanner. Verse 43 shows the setting was being prepared for the conversion of Cornelius. As instructed by vision, Cornelius would subsequently send men to Simon’s house to find Peter.

Acts 10:1 There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band,

All of the events in Acts Chapters 1 through 9 occurred in a little more than three years, for Chapter 10, the account of the first Gentile convert, took place in AD 36.

Cornelius, a Roman centurion, lived in Caesarea. A centurion was a leader of a band of (usually) 100 soldiers, although sometimes the number was as high as 600.

Acts 10:2 A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always.

Cornelius was commended for (1) being devout, (2) fearing (reverencing) God, (3) giving much alms, and (4) praying to God always (continually). What an unusual man—no wonder he was chosen as the first Gentile convert! However, up until this time, even with all of these qualifications, he was not in covenant relationship with God because favor had not yet gone to the Gentiles.

Comment: Since Cornelius was neither a Jew nor a proselyte, the phrase “with all his house” shows that he had a powerful influence on the rest of his household, or family.

Q: Is Cornelius the centurion who donated large sums of money to build a synagogue in Capernaum (Luke 7:5)?

A: It is purely speculative as to whether he is. Three centurions are favorably mentioned in the New Testament, and in about twelve instances, the word “centurion” is used to refer to an unnamed individual. This account in the Book of Acts is unusual because a name, Cornelius, is given. Of the multiple references to a “centurion” in the New Testament, we do not know how many of the citations refer to the same individual, but probably some of them do because of the similarities. The centurion who had the sick servant and went to Jesus for help donated money *to the synagogue in the vicinity of Galilee*. Here Cornelius of *Caesarea* is described as giving “much alms” *to the people*. These differences keep us from saying with certainty that the two centurions were the same personality.

Acts 10:3 He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius.

The “ninth hour of the day” was 3 p.m., the end of the Jewish service and the “hour of prayer” (Acts 3:1). The word “evidently” signifies that *later*, when this incident with Cornelius was recorded and the pieces were put together, everyone was impressed with how God had operated on both ends: with Peter in Joppa and with Cornelius in Caesarea. There were simultaneous prayers and actions where the Lord, at two extremes, was causing things to happen at the same time. Since Cornelius gave his alms to the people, we do not know whether he worshipped the God of Israel or just an unknown God, whom he believed existed.

Jesus gave the keys of the Kingdom of heaven to Peter (Matt. 16:19). Hence Peter was instrumental in opening the door to the Jews at Pentecost and now to the Gentiles via Cornelius in AD 36. To repeat: Peter opened the door to the Gentiles. Therefore, Philip’s preaching to the Samaritans earlier and his speaking to the Ethiopian eunuch were not the opening of the door to the Gentiles (Acts 8:5,26-28). Chronologically speaking, these facts are important, for the nation of Israel was to have *exclusive* favor for 70 “weeks” of years, and the door would be opened to the Gentiles at the end of that time period, or AD 36. Stated another way, when the Gentiles were addressed in AD 36, that marked the end of *exclusive* favor to the nation of Israel.

Acts 10:4 And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said

unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.

“When he [the angel] looked [intently] on him [Cornelius], he was afraid.” Although Cornelius was fearful, he asked, “What is it, Lord?” Cornelius used the word “Lord” because he recognized that the angel was no ordinary person. (The vision was very real at the time.) The angel’s answer was significant, for it shows that the prayers of Cornelius had been *accumulating* higher and higher: “Thy prayers and thine alms are *come up* for a memorial before God.” Prayers are requests, and finally, after a period of time, the prayers of Cornelius demanded an answer. In other words, God had heard all of the prayers but had purposely delayed the answer regarding what Cornelius really wanted. Cornelius may have realized that God was rewarding him providentially, but the burden of his prayers was to know the way and the truth. He wanted to *know God* for a closer communion.

Acts 10:5 And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter:

Why did the angel instruct Cornelius to send others to Joppa and not tell Cornelius to go himself? Why was Cornelius to remain with the household? One reason could be that when the Holy Spirit came, it was on his whole household, his relatives, and his close friends—a *company* of Gentiles all gathered in his house. If Cornelius had gone to Joppa, the Holy Spirit would have come on him alone.

Acts 10:6 He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do.

“He [Peter] shall tell thee” what to do. The angel was saying, “*Simon the tanner* lives in Joppa in a house on the shoreline, on the coast of the sea. There you will find *Simon Peter*, who will tell you what to do.” This instruction illustrates the principle of *two witnesses*, for there were *two Simons* from two different backgrounds and families. Cornelius was given a double confirmation—to look for the *Simon Peter* in the house of *Simon the tanner*.

Acts 10:7 And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually;

Not only his family and servants but also a “devout soldier” had come under the influence of Cornelius and his reverence for God. Of those who waited on Cornelius continually, this devout soldier could be trusted for the important mission to come.

Acts 10:8 And when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa.

Cornelius told the two servants and the soldier of his experience and then sent them to Joppa. It is interesting that Cornelius confided in them. As a man of influence, he could have just issued the order, but telling them of his experience had beneficial effects as follows:

1. They realized how *important* the mission was for Cornelius.
2. They could explain to Peter *with conviction and reason* why Cornelius wanted Peter to come back with them to Caesarea.
3. They would perform the mission *speedily*.
4. Assuming they were sympathetic to the views of Cornelius, they went to Peter with *great zeal*, and their enthusiasm was transmitted to Peter. A cold letter would not have had such an impact.
5. The two servants and the soldier knew that Peter should be respected.

Jesus had said that whatever a Roman citizen legitimately asked to be done, his disciples should do more: “Go with him twain [two miles]” (Matt. 5:41). Hence a Roman centurion had considerable authority not only over his own troops but also over the Jews.

Acts 10:9 On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour:

The two servants and the soldier had left the previous day toward evening and traveled by night. (Since Cornelius had had his vision at 3 p.m., the three would have left subsequently that same day.) Now it was the next day, and they continued on their journey. Joppa is about 40 miles from Caesarea, 80 miles round-trip. The trip took four days, two days each way (Acts 10:30). That was a long trip. As the three were in transit and nearing the city, Peter was on the housetop (the roof) in prayer at noontime, waiting for the meal that was being prepared.

Acts 10:10 And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance,

Peter “became very hungry” before “he fell into a trance [a vision].” As he prayed, a terrific wave of hunger came over him. The hunger was greater than usual, and apparently, he made this fact known to the meal providers downstairs so that they would hurry the meal.

Acts 10:11 And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth:

Peter saw “heaven opened” and a vessel descending. In the vision, a *huge* sheet that curved upward at the four corners like a fitted sheet was coming down to the earth.

Acts 10:12 Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.

In this tremendous sheet, which descended before Peter’s presence, were “*all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.*” The sheet was tucked at the four corners to contain (like a vessel) a *mixture* of clean and unclean animals and birds.

Acts 10:13 And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.

As Peter was kneeling or sitting in prayer, a voice said, “Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.”

Acts 10:14 But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean.

When Peter looked at the mixture of so many clean and unclean animals and birds crowded together in the sheet (such as a lion, a camel, a hare, a hyena, a vulture, a hawk, a bat, a mouse, a lizard, and a snail), he said, “No, for I have never eaten any unclean thing.” In the conglomeration were animals and birds that were forbidden under the Law. Therefore, the command to eat was a temptation because he was *very hungry*. However, it was just like Peter to say, “No!”

Acts 10:15 And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.

Again the voice spoke, “Do not call common [unclean] that which God has cleansed.”

Comment: The account sounds as if all of the animals and birds in the sheet were unclean.

Reply: The *Diaglott* reads, “In which were all the four-footed beasts of the earth and the wild

beasts and the creeping things and the birds of the heaven.” The fact that “all” quadrupeds were in the sheet implies the inclusion of both clean and unclean. Although Peter was looking at a conglomeration, the preponderance would have been *unclean*. Not only were there *many* animals, birds, and creeping things, but Peter was not familiar with all of them, so it was impossible for him to kill and eat only the clean ones. Peter was puzzled because God had said, “Rise ... and eat,” and had not made any distinction between the clean and the unclean.

Acts 10:16 This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven.

This scene was repeated *three* times—the sheet being lowered, the voice speaking, and the sheet being taken up to heaven—so that there would be *three* witnesses. Also, the three times showed special emphasis. The actions had to be repeated because under the Law, the Jews were not only forbidden to eat unclean things but were admonished to stay separate from the Gentiles. Peter’s reaction shows that when one is cultured in a fellowship or doctrine to think along a certain line, it is extremely difficult to do independent thinking or to observe progression, *especially if conscience is involved*.

Why did the sheet come down *from heaven*? Although it is true that the sheet descended from heaven to show that the vision and the command to rise and eat came from God, there was a further meaning; namely, these creatures *were all made by God*. When God brought the creatures before Adam for naming, Adam was to name *all* of them, not just the clean ones (Gen. 2:19,20). The New Testament states, “For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving” (1 Tim. 4:4).

The sheet was called a “vessel,” and Noah’s Ark was also a vessel. Both contained clean and unclean animals. Noah and his three sons and their four wives were saved from the Flood, but so were all creatures indigenous to the area. (Fish were excluded in both cases.) It is important to realize that with both Noah’s Ark and this sheet, the animals represent human beings, clean and unclean. Noah is a type of Jesus, and his three sons picture three divisions of the Church. The four wives represent the covenant under which they were developed and to which they were bound.

Of the three perspectives or antitypes of Noah, we will briefly consider only the Kingdom picture after the Time of Trouble (the Flood) when the resurrection takes place. Survivors of the great Time of Trouble will be both clean and unclean, but by the end of the Millennium, all of the unclean will have been weeded out, and only the clean will remain.

Q: In the antitype, who are the surviving “clean animals” after the Flood, or Time of Trouble? Are they the Holy Remnant and the Ancient Worthies?

A: Yes, the surviving clean animals picture the Ancient Worthies in one sense and the Holy Remnant in another sense. The Ancient Worthies will come forth from the grave (the watery deep) perfect, being “just men” who “have done good” (Heb. 12:23; John 5:28,29). Baptism and Jonah’s whale in the sea are two other pictures where water symbolizes the grave.

Comment: With the sheet being huge and little Peter being on the ground, he might not have been able to see many of the animals until the sheet got down close to earth. Perhaps he heard animal sounds and bird calls, screeching, and squawking to add to the aura of mostly unclean creatures.

Reply: That could well be—the trumpet of an elephant, the bray of a donkey, etc. Imagine such an overwhelming picture occurring three times!

Acts 10:17 Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should

mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate,

Acts 10:18 And called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there.

Peter was very confused about the meaning of this vision. He could not make the connection, and neither could we have done so back there. Meanwhile, the drama kept unfolding. The others, having arrived from Caesarea, were downstairs inquiring for Peter.

Acts 10:19 While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee.

Acts 10:20 Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them.

The voice, or "Spirit," said to Peter, "Three men seek you. Go with them, doubting nothing, for I [God] have sent them." This specific direction was necessary in the midst of Peter's perplexity.

Verses 19 and 20 sound as if the Spirit is a personality, so we must use other Scriptures to disprove that thought. The Spirit was like a voice *in the ear*. Sometimes the voice in the ear said, "Thus saith the LORD," and sometimes not. There was no appearance, just instruction. The phrase "the Spirit said" was often used when "Thus saith the LORD" was omitted.

Acts 10:21 Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius; and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause wherefore ye are come?

Peter went obediently downstairs to see the men and asked why they had come.

Acts 10:22 And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee.

Again Cornelius was commended: "a just man ... [who] feareth God, and of good report among ... the Jews." The Jews who resided in Caesarea knew of the generosity and alms of Cornelius. The three men from Caesarea explained their mission to Peter.

Acts 10:23 Then called he them in, and lodged them. And on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him.

Peter invited the three to come in for food, lodging, and rest. Peter's vision had started at noon and took perhaps an hour. Now he was ready to eat, so it was logical for him to invite the men in for a repast. The next morning (day 3), Peter left Joppa with the three to go to Caesarea. Six Jewish brethren accompanied Peter (Acts 11:12), for it was important to have *Jewish* witnesses.

Acts 10:24 And the morrow after they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends.

The "morrow after," which was day 4, they entered Caesarea. This Caesarea was north of Joppa, 40 miles away, and on the seacoast. It was not Caesarea Philippi, which was north of the Sea of Galilee. During the four days' wait, Cornelius had gathered together his relatives and close friends in anticipation of Peter's arrival, and he had also fasted (Acts 10:30). To summon all of these individuals showed the *faith* of Cornelius.

Acts 10:25 And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him.

Acts 10:26 But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man.

Imagine seeing a *Roman centurion* fall down before a *Jewish fisherman*! Cornelius had worshipped God for many years—possibly even before he was stationed in Israel and before Jesus' 3 1/2-year ministry. In succinct words, Peter corrected the centurion: "Stand up; I myself also am a man." Subsequently Paul and Barnabas had a similar experience (Acts 14:12-15). And the Apostle John symbolically warned the John class not to inordinately revere the seventh messenger (Rev. 19:10). Reverence for God is important for all, Gentile and Jew.

Comment: Cornelius was an unusual man. He witnessed to family and friends and fasted for four days even *before* he became a Christian. What a wonderful spirit he manifested!

Acts 10:27 And as he talked with him, he went in, and found many that were come together.

Peter "found *many* that were come together." Assembled there with Peter were Cornelius and his family, kinsmen, and close friends, as well as the two servants and the devout soldier sent to get Peter at Joppa and the six Jewish Christians who accompanied Peter to Caesarea. Just as a sizable number had witnessed the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the Jews at Pentecost, so now a sizable group would witness the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Gentiles.

Acts 10:28 And he said unto them, 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 shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.

To "keep company" means "to have close friendship with." Although some contact with Gentiles occurred because Israel was under the control of Rome—for example, in business dealings—the Jews had maintained a strict reserve according to the Law. Now Peter realized that the Gentiles were no longer unclean if they accepted Christ, for three times God had shown him the vision of a sheet filled with clean and unclean animals and fowl coming down to earth, and the Holy Spirit had instructed him to go with the three men from Caesarea who came to the house in Joppa seeking him. Moreover, Peter was told to go without doubting or questioning. After feeding and lodging the three overnight, he departed with them the next morning.

Acts 10:29 Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me?

After the vision was given three times, Peter showed obedience and submission by going quickly and "without gainsaying," that is, without verbal rebellion or protesting or further questioning, even though he was perplexed as to the meaning of the vision. The three men who were sent by Cornelius had testified to Peter that Cornelius was "a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews" (Acts 10:22). Although he knew that Cornelius, a centurion and thus a Gentile, was to "hear words" from him, Peter now asked, "Why did you send for me?" Peter wanted further particulars.

Acts 10:30 And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing,

The account was repeated in order to have a second and a third witness. The "ninth hour," that is, 3 p.m., was the accustomed hour of prayer, the "time of incense," the time of the evening sacrifice when the second daily lamb was offered (Luke 1:10; Exod. 29:39). At that hour, a

“man” stood before Cornelius in bright clothing. We are reminded of the angel who appeared to Zacharias at the same time of day (Luke 1:11,12).

Acts 10:31 And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God.

Acts 10:32 Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee.

Verses 31 and 32 give the angel's message. The prayer of Cornelius had been heard, and his alms were remembered. In other words, God had previously taken note of his works and prayers, which had been accumulating, and now, in the year AD 36, was the time to officially recognize them.

Acts 10:33 Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.

As a centurion who was used to promptness from the military command under him, Cornelius appreciated Peter's quick response. Peter had come “immediately” the next morning after necessary food and sleep. The three men whom Cornelius had sent traversed the 80-mile round-trip in the minimum time of four days. Cornelius knew that Peter could not get to Caesarea in less than four days, but he had gathered the others in the hope that Peter would arrive as soon as possible. Of course Cornelius knew that his own servants and the soldier would get to Joppa in two days, for they were used to taking orders. Then he assumed that Peter would come quickly because the message was *from God*.

Acts 10:34 Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:

Acts 10:35 But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.

Here are qualifications for acceptance: God is not a respecter of persons regarding those who (1) *reverence Him* and (2) “*worketh righteousness.*” The right heart condition is essential.

Acts 10:36 The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:)

Acts 10:37 That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached;

Acts 10:38 How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.

Peter assumed that Cornelius, because of his position as a centurion, was well aware of Jesus and his reputation. However, Cornelius did not know Jesus as Savior. John the Baptist first attracted national attention with his purpose of introducing Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus then fulfilled his ministry of 3 1/2 years. Meanwhile, Cornelius feared (reverenced) God and was giving alms, but to have God's favor in this new gospel dispensation, he needed to know about and accept Jesus' role. Even though he was aware of Christianity as a “cult” of the Nazarene, and even though loyal followers were preaching that Jesus was sent of God, Cornelius needed

assurance. Also, knowing that the Jews were very clannish and separate as a people, as was proper under the Law, he needed to be encouraged and recognized in a fashion that would persuade him.

When John the Baptist suddenly appeared from the desert to the Jewish people, they were startled both to see a man clothed in camel skin and to hear him preaching repentance and the coming of the Messiah. The people thought of the words in the last chapter of the Old Testament, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD" (Mal. 4:5). They assumed that John the Baptist was Elijah the prophet, but John said, "The one who is coming after me is greater than me. I am not worthy to even tie his shoelaces." Jesus backed up his claim to be the Messiah with many, many miracles. Although news was noised abroad that Jesus was a Prophet, one needed a *personal* calling by the Lord in order to be fully persuaded that he was the Messiah. Cornelius knew that he was to receive words ("all things") from Peter, but he did not know in advance what those words would be.

Acts 10:39 And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree:

Acts 10:40 Him God raised up the third day, and showed him openly;

Acts 10:41 Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead.

Acts 10:42 And he 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 and dead.

Acts 10:43 To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.

Peter testified that God had anointed Jesus and that God's favor was with him. Then Peter mentioned the Crucifixion. His words suggest that it was essential not to bypass the details which would bring into question whether Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus had professed to be the Messiah, yet he was crucified. To popularize the message of Jesus, *human* wisdom would dictate leaving out details that might create doubt and that would be an obstacle to belief. But the apostles told the truth just as it had literally happened and then gave their *personal* testimony that Jesus had risen from the dead.

After his resurrection, Jesus was seen by all of the apostles, who even ate and drank with him. "Him God raised up the third day, and showed ... openly; Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead." Jesus was seen not by the nation but in the Galilee region and only by those whom God purposed. Relatively speaking, many were willing to testify that they had seen Jesus. On one occasion, he was seen by 500 brethren all at the same time, so there were many eyewitnesses (1 Cor. 15:6).

Jesus commanded the apostles to testify that he was "ordained of God to be the Judge of [the] quick and [the] dead." In other words, Jesus was appointed by God to be the Judge of not only the living but also the dead.

Acts 10:44 While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.

Acts 10:45 And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came

with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Acts 10:46 For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter,

What a startling account! Peter was starting to give a long baptismal sermon, or discourse, about Jesus when he was *interrupted* by a manifestation of the Holy Spirit's coming down as it had 3 1/2 years earlier at Pentecost with the Jews. Not only was the similarity to Pentecost astonishing to the Jews, but also, while Peter was *actually speaking*, the Holy Spirit descended without formal prayer and without an altar call, as it were. Peter had simply said that whoever believed in Jesus would receive the remission of sins through his name, and *immediately* the Holy Spirit came on the waiting Gentiles because they were in a receiving attitude. It is a testimony to the life and heart condition of Cornelius that he had witnessed to and gathered so many others to hear someone who had not yet arrived. Of the Gentiles assembled there, waiting in expectation, *all* were right-hearted and thus "heard the word" and received the Holy Spirit. Notice, too, that the Holy Spirit *preceded* baptism here, and there was no laying on of hands by the apostles.

Comment: These consecrations were bona fide. Some have reasoned, "How could *all* in a group be sincere at the same time?" but God would have carefully selected those who were present.

Reply: They were all in the right heart attitude. The account does not mean that every individual Cornelius invited came, but it means that those who responded and did come were in the right heart attitude and, therefore, received the Holy Spirit. Cornelius had probably told those he invited that an angel had appeared to him, and thus he passed on a message of confidentiality. His reaction of wanting to share his experience with others is characteristic of many when they first accept the truth. What is unusual is that Cornelius did this *before* Peter arrived.

Acts 10:47 Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?

Acts 10:48 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.

Peter had been ready to give a long sermon, but now he reverted to his spontaneous, blunt fashion and addressed the six Jewish Christians who had accompanied him: "Can any man forbid water baptism to these Gentiles, since they received the Holy Spirit as we did?" Since Caesarea was on the Mediterranean coast, water for baptism was nearby. When none could forbid water baptism to these Gentiles, Peter "commanded" (gave the authority for) it to be done. One reason Peter authoritatively arranged baptism was for the benefit of the six *Jewish brethren*. He wanted to fix indelibly on their minds the acceptance of the Gentiles. After all, Peter knew how a devout Jew would react because three times he himself had needed to have the vision of the clean and unclean animals in the sheet. The role of the six Jewish brethren as *witnesses* would become very important at a subsequent gathering soon to take place, when Peter would be reprimanded for having baptized Gentiles.

After their baptism in the name of the Lord, the Gentiles "prayed" (besought, *begged*) Peter to stay and teach them more, wanting to hear all that he could tell them. No doubt Peter did stay.

Acts 11:1 And the apostles and brethren that were in Judaea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God.

Acts 11:2 And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him,

Acts 11:3 Saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them.

Acts 11:4 But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them, saying,

Acts 11:5 I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even to me:

Jewish Christians were stirred up and “*contended*” with Peter when he went to a conference in Jerusalem in regard to his preaching to and fraternizing with Gentiles. Peter used the opportunity to relate “the matter from the beginning.” The other apostles, as well as brethren, were present. It was advantageous for him to be able to explain to many at the same time rather than to rehearse the matter to them one by one at various times.

Because the host controlled the order, or the procedure, there was a big difference between Gentiles eating in Jewish homes and Jews eating in Gentile homes. The latter situation was especially frowned upon. Business dealings were one thing, but staying, eating, and communing with Gentiles for any length of time were another circumstance. For the Jew under the Law, such fraternizing was to be avoided if possible. Spiritually speaking, Paul’s counsel was not to “eat” with anyone who is called a “brother” if he has committed unrepented-of grievous sin (1 Cor. 5:11). Otherwise, we would be having a rapport with the individual instead of disfellowshipping him.

Acts 11:6 Upon the which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.

Acts 11:7 And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter; slay and eat.

Acts 11:8 But I said, Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth.

Acts 11:9 But the voice answered me again from heaven, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.

Acts 11:10 And this was done three times: and all were drawn up again into heaven.

Acts 11:11 And, behold, immediately there were three men already come unto the house where I was, sent from Caesarea unto me.

Acts 11:12 And the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man’s house:

Acts 11:13 And he showed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter;

Acts 11:14 Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved.

Acts 11:15 And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning.

Acts 11:16 Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost.

Immediately after the sheet was drawn up into heaven the third time, “the Spirit bade” Peter to go downstairs, where he saw the three men sent by Cornelius. Then, “nothing doubting,” he went with them back to Caesarea. Verses 6-16 are mostly repetition and a historical review. Verse 12 supplies the information that the Jewish brethren who accompanied Peter were six in number. Verse 15 proves Peter was interrupted: “As I *began to speak*, the Holy Spirit fell on them.” The implication is that he had intended to speak longer, so he was just getting warmed up about Jesus when he was interrupted.

Acts 11:17 Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?

Acts 11:18 When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.

Peter’s rehearsal of the details convinced the others that God had also granted repentance to the Gentiles. And Peter had six Jewish witnesses to corroborate his words.

Acts 11:19 Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only.

Stephen’s persecution, in which Paul had been involved, caused many Jewish Christians to leave Israel for Phenice (Phoenicia, just north of Israel), Cyprus (an island in the Mediterranean), and Antioch (east of Cyprus on the shoreline and north of Phoenicia). In these places, the Jewish Christians preached only to Jews.

Acts 11:20 And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus.

Acts 11:21 And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.

Converts, Christian Jews from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and preached to the “Grecians” (Greeks, that is, *Gentiles*). These “Greeks” were not Jews, for the Grecian Jews had been preached to earlier. This development with the Gentiles was significant and startling, for shortly after Cornelius and other Gentiles were accepted at Caesarea, as Peter testified, a similar situation occurred north of Israel, where additional Gentiles embraced the truth. In other words, Christian Jews fleeing persecution in Jerusalem preached to the Jews in Cyprus and Cyrene. Some of these Jews accepted Jesus and, in turn, preached to Greeks in Antioch. Many Greeks believed—even more Gentiles than at the time of the conversion of Cornelius.

Another case is recorded where “Grecians” were not Jews (John 12:20,21). Just before Jesus’ crucifixion, some Greeks desired to hear his message. They wanted an audience with Jesus, but the Gospels do not say whether he complied.

Acts 11:22 Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch.

Acts 11:23 Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.

Acts 11:24 For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord.

Acts 11:25 Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul:

Tidings of Gentile converts in the north reached the ears of Jewish Christians still in Jerusalem. Gentile converts now began to come into the Church in droves, and Antioch became very famous as a center of Christianity. It took this outside multiplication for many of the Christian Jews to realize that a great dispensational change was taking place. The conversions showed that the Grecian Jews were more flexible in their thinking than the Jews in Israel.

The Jerusalem Jews decided to send Barnabas to Antioch. He was a good man who had much faith and was filled with the Holy Spirit. In addition, Barnabas had wealth and was John Mark's uncle and a Levite from Cyprus (Acts 4:36). Being more open-minded than other Jews, he had recognized Paul's conversion as sincere. Because of his quality of open-mindedness, the brethren in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to Antioch in regard to the flood of Gentile converts coming into the Church (Acts 9:27). After seeing the "grace of God" in their lives, he exhorted them to be steadfast and to "cleave unto the Lord." Then Barnabas left Antioch and headed for Tarsus to find Paul, the zealot, who would be a wonderful associate in handling the Gentile influx.

Acts 11:26 And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.

Barnabas found Paul and brought him to Antioch, where they assembled with the Church for a year and did much teaching. Antioch became famous as the first place the name "Christian" was used. In fact, it was almost like a tacit rebuke—that the first city to be Christianized was Antioch and not Jerusalem and was even outside Judea because of prejudice.

Acts 11:27 And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch.

Acts 11:28 And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar.

Acts 11:29 Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea:

Acts 11:30 Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

When Agabus prophesied of a coming famine in Jerusalem and all the earth, the disciples, according to ability, sent relief money to the Judean brethren by means of Barnabas and Saul (two very trusted ones). The money was sent in advance of the famine to be on hand as a fund for the brethren in their coming time of need.

As was characteristic, Luke named Claudius Caesar, thus giving recognition to Gentile chronology. The chronology is helpful, especially since it is not in the other Gospels. Luke also mentioned Augustus and Tiberius Caesar (Luke 2:1; 3:1). The famine occurred during the reign of Claudius Caesar, which was future from the time setting of Acts Chapter 11, when Caligula was emperor. When Caligula died in AD 41, Claudius was made emperor and reigned from AD 41 to 54.

Prophecy was one of the gifts in the early Church, and Agabus had that gift. There was no New Testament then, so literal prophecy of coming events was given as a gift.

Acts 12:1 Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the

church.

Acts 12:2 And he killed James the brother of John with the sword.

This “Herod,” who was Herod Agrippa I, killed James Zebedee, the brother of the Apostle John. To kill “with the sword” means that James Zebedee was beheaded like John the Baptist and the Apostle Paul.

Acts 12:3 And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.)

Acts 12:4 And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people.

About AD 39, Herod also seized Peter. Both James Zebedee and Peter were apprehended at the season of Passover, the same time of year that Jesus was crucified. Thus there are examples in Scripture that Passover is a critical time. The death of Peter was supposed to take place *after* the seven-day Feast of Passover, for if it had occurred during the feast, the services would have been disrupted and the Jews would have protested that their feast was sullied. Herod was trying to cater to the wishes of the Jews, and since the death of James pleased the people, Herod thought Peter’s execution would also please them. In summary, then, during the Passover season, Peter was found, apprehended, and imprisoned. His imprisonment was under “four quaternions,” that is, four shifts of four soldiers each. According to the Greek, the word “Easter” in verse 4 should be “Passover.”

Acts 12:5 Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.

Acts 12:6 And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison.

Peter’s loss as a leader would have been sorely felt, for James Zebedee, Peter, and John were the most popular of the apostles and James Zebedee had already been slain. Therefore, much prayer was said on Peter’s behalf for several days. The brethren might have prayed earlier for James too, but now the concern was being impressed upon the disciples and they prayed “without ceasing.” It was now the night prior to the intended execution, so the answer to the prayers came at the “midnight” hour, the *last moment*, as it were, before Herod intended to orchestrate Peter’s death. For the petitioner to get the lasting benefit, prayers are frequently delayed as, for example, with the importunate widow (Luke 18:1-5). On the other hand, sometimes an immediate answer to prayer is propitious.

Now we get a better picture of how four soldiers guarded Peter. Each of Peter’s arms was chained to a soldier inside the prison cell. Two other soldiers (“keepers”) were outside the prison cell, guarding the door. At the time, Peter was in a deep sleep. Incidentally, shackles were usually put on tightly, to the point where they hurt.

Acts 12:7 And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands.

With the appearance of the “angel of the Lord” in the prison cell, a light shone. Of course the soldiers would not have seen the light. The angel “smote” (or kicked) Peter on the side to

awaken him, raised him up, and told him to arise quickly. The chains miraculously fell off Peter's arms, freeing him.

Acts 12:8 And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me.

The angel told Peter to gird himself, put on his sandals and his garment, and follow him. What Peter could not do for himself (remove the shackles), the angel did. What Peter was capable of doing, he was expected to do himself. The angel showed tender concern that Peter would be warm enough when he went outside in the cool of the night.

Acts 12:9 And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision.

Peter followed the angel, thinking that what was happening was a vision, not a reality.

Acts 12:10 When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him.

Peter and the angel passed through two prison wards, probably going through two locked doors. The prison was outside the city near the Jaffa Gate, so the next problem was to get into the city. When they reached the large iron gate, it opened miraculously so that they could enter the city. (The gate probably closed miraculously too.) As they passed through one street, the angel left Peter. All this time the brethren were praying for Peter.

Acts 12:11 And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews.

Acts 12:12 And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying.

During the rather long walk, Peter realized that God was delivering him. He went to John Mark's house, where brethren were gathered together, praying. (John Mark, who was Peter's amanuensis for the Gospel of Mark, subsequently deserted Paul on a missionary journey but was eventually reinstated.)

Acts 12:13 And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda.

Acts 12:14 And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate.

Rhoda answered Peter's knock and recognized his voice. In her surprise and joy, she did not open the door but, instead, ran to tell the others.

Acts 12:15 And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel.

Acts 12:16 But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished.

Acts 12:17 But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto

them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go show these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place.

When Peter continued to knock, the brethren opened the door and were astonished to see him. Peter beckoned to them not to make a lot of noise, for he was an escaped prisoner and it was the middle of the night. Too much commotion by the “many [who] were gathered together” would attract attention (Acts 12:12). After meeting with them, he departed for another place for safety reasons. The brethren returned to their respective homes, the reason for prayer no longer being valid. This “James” was probably the Lord’s brother (and apostle), that is, James Alphaeus, as opposed to James Zebedee.

Peter’s caution for quiet was necessary because brethren are sometimes completely oblivious to the propriety of a situation. For example, when the Pastor was scheduled to preach a sermon in the Hippodrome to a large Jewish audience, he gave strict orders in advance to the brethren for absolutely no tracting. In fact, that was a stipulation if Jews were to attend the meeting. They would be glad to come and hear what he had to say, but they did not want any proselytizing. And what happened? In their enthusiasm, some of the brethren gave out tracts anyway and caused a disturbance. Not only had the Pastor’s instructions not sunk in, but he had to apologize to the Jews to whom he had given assurance. That was a very humiliating experience for the Pastor. After all, if God had arranged the opportunity for the brethren as a group, that would have been a different situation, but on this occasion, the Jews had come to hear the Pastor.

Acts 12:18 Now as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter.

Acts 12:19 And when Herod had sought for him, and found him not, he examined the keepers, and commanded that they should be put to death. And he went down from Judaea to Caesarea, and there abode.

There arose a commotion among the soldiers: Where was Peter? Imagine waking up and finding the prison empty! Herod ordered an extensive prison search, examined the four soldiers on that shift, and then ordered their death and probably also the death of their superiors. In addition, a search was conducted in the city and suburbs and even in houses, but Peter was not found because he had left Jerusalem. Taking a circuitous route to avoid apprehension, he went south in Judah first and then to Caesarea farther north on the seacoast and dwelled there for a while.

Acts 12:20 And Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon: but they came with one accord to him, and, having made Blastus the king’s chamberlain their friend, desired peace; because their country was nourished by the king’s country.

Verse 20 starts a new subject and tells about a problem that existed. Tyre and Sidon, which were in Lebanon, were receiving a subsidy from the government in Israel. Many years before, King Solomon had made arrangements with these two places whereby favors were done for one another. Evidently, these arrangements continued after the death of Solomon and Hiram. At the present time, Herod was highly displeased with the inhabitants of these cities, and they desired peace.

Acts 12:21 And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them.

Acts 12:22 And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man.

Acts 12:23 And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost.

Herod Agrippa I, who was a powerful and eloquent speaker, sat on his throne to address the problem with Tyre and Sidon. After his oration, the people of those cities shouted, "It is the voice of a god!" Herod had intentionally worn royal apparel to encourage this type of adulation. Immediately he was smitten because he did not give God the glory. The "worms" were an intestinal disease that rapidly killed him. In this case, God reacted quickly in righteous indignation, whereas He usually delays action. These events were very dramatic, and they will be seen in this light someday.

Notice that Herod was called "a god," yet there is no article in the Greek. Therefore, John 1:1 should also be "a god" (*theos*) in contrast to "the God" (*ho theos*).

The incident with Herod reminds us of King Nebuchadnezzar's punishment. He was struck with madness for seven years when he proudly admired the palace, the Hanging Gardens, the city of Babylon, etc., and attributed the accomplishments to *himself* rather than to God. Thus there are occasions, even in the present age, when the Lord takes actions against the unconsecrated.

In the case of Antichrist, God has delayed retribution because to act too soon would defeat His purpose. The Antichrist system has been permitted by God as a test on the true Church during the Gospel Age. In other words, the Lord is judicious in His anger. On some occasions, He might strike an unconsecrated person dead right away, but where a long-term purpose is involved, He might allow the blasphemy. The Antichrist system has been a means of refining the consecrated and proving their mettle both for their own good and for the good of the observers.

Acts 12:24 But the word of God grew and multiplied.

The Word of God prospered after Herod's death. In the interval before a successor was established, there was a period of confusion, contesting, and political pull, which diverted the attention of the authorities. During that hiatus, witnessing opportunities opened up and persecution ceased. Also, now that Herod was dead, the incident with Peter was forgotten, and he was no longer sought by the soldiers.

Acts 12:25 And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark.

Barnabas and Saul had come to Jerusalem to bring donations to the brethren for the famine that would be occurring shortly in Judea (Acts 11:29,30). They stayed in Jerusalem for a while and superintended how the money would be distributed, making sure that it was dispensed properly and justly. Now that the charge regarding the donations had been fulfilled (see King James margin), Barnabas and Saul, plus John Mark, left Jerusalem together and headed for Antioch. Antioch became a center from which Paul started his missionary tours.

Acts 13:1 Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

Of the prophets and teachers in Antioch, Simeon was from Nigeria, and Lucius was also from Africa. Manaen was Herod's foster brother (see the King James margin).

Acts 13:2 As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me

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

As the brethren fasted, the Holy Spirit indicated that they should separate Barnabas and Saul for a work. How did the Holy Spirit do this? Perhaps lots were cast, or a prophet spoke a message under the inspiration of the Spirit. If the latter method was used, there would be a special reason for the inclusion of the word “prophets” in verse 1.

Acts 13:3 And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

Again the brethren fasted and prayed, this time for the missionary and witnessing effort of Barnabas and Saul. Even though the Holy Spirit had separated these two from the others, the brethren, knowing this mission was very important, wanted to do more than just pray for God’s blessing to be upon Barnabas and Saul. Therefore, they fasted to give greater intensity to their prayers, that is, to offer fervent, effectual prayer (James 5:16).

The brethren “laid their hands” on Barnabas and Saul. At this time, the brethren misunderstood the meaning, for Paul said later that their laying on of hands merely indicated they were in *sympathy* with the work and nothing more. *God*, not men, had done the selecting not only by having the Holy Spirit say, “Separate unto me Barnabas and Saul,” but also by Jesus’ appearing to Saul on the way to Damascus at the time of his conversion. Saul was told he would be God’s representative to the Gentiles. Subsequently Paul had to remind the brethren of this fact, for others felt they were equal to Paul in authority, especially because of his appearance and poor eyesight.

Acts 13:4 So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus.

Barnabas and Saul began their first missionary journey by going to the seaport of Seleucia and then sailing the trade route to the island of Cyprus.

Acts 13:5 And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John to their minister.

They went to the city of Salamis on the island of Cyprus, the homeland of Barnabas, to preach the Word of God (Acts 4:36). John Mark, who accompanied Barnabas and Saul on their first missionary journey, was subordinate to them (he was “their minister”). Barnabas was John Mark’s uncle. John Mark would have been a deacon, and he should have served faithfully and respectfully.

Acts 13:6 And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar-jesus:

When they went to the city of Paphos on Cyprus, they found a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-jesus, meaning “son of Jesus.” Thus we know that others had the name Jesus.

Acts 13:7 Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God.

The deputy of Cyprus, Sergius Paulus, wanted to hear Barnabas and Saul speak. It was prudent of him to hear the message himself and not judge by secondhand or thirdhand information. Obviously, he had heard that the gospel was being preached, and he wanted to give the message a hearing. Those who judge a matter before they hear it are not sound in their

thinking.

Acts 13:8 But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith.

Elymas (Bar-jesus), the sorcerer, tried to negate the preaching of Barnabas and Saul, especially as it might affect the deputy. Elymas feared that his own popularity would be undercut.

Acts 13:9 Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him,

Acts 13:10 And said, O full of all subtlety and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?

Acts 13:11 And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand.

Acts 13:12 Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.

Speaking bluntly, Saul put a curse on Elymas that resulted in blindness. When the deputy witnessed the miraculous power that Saul possessed, he was very impressed and thus was more amenable to the doctrine of the gospel, which hopefully had a beneficial effect on him the remainder of his life.

Acts 13:13 Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem.

Comment: Of the two disciples, Barnabas was named first until Saul spoke with power and commanded blindness to come on the sorcerer. Now Saul was called “Paul,” and the expression used was “Paul and his company.”

Reply: Since Paul was not handsome, it was only after hearing him awhile that others saw the depth of his erudition and scholarship, his handling of the language, and his logic. He was not given to flowery speech but spoke very direct, forcefully, and mathematically, using comparisons and contrasts in his style of delivery. Evidently, Barnabas was more impressive in appearance and had a pleasant, engaging disposition and manner, but Paul was more impressive in speech.

At this point, John Mark abandoned Paul and Barnabas. What caused the separation is conjecture, but perhaps he was not prepared for the rigors—both the discomfiture and the persecutions—of the journey. At any rate, repercussions came later.

Acts 13:14 But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and sat down.

Perga was on the seacoast of the southern portion of Turkey. From Perga, Paul and the others went to Antioch in Pisidia. (There were many Antiochs, and this was a different one.) Paul and Barnabas entered the synagogue and sat down on the courtyard floor, taking advantage of the sabbath day. The other Jews would have noticed these two strangers, obviously newcomers, entering their midst.

The Jews’ “house” was left desolate in AD 33 (Matt. 23:38). Nevertheless, on their missionary

journeys, the apostles went first to the synagogues on the sabbath because they had *opportunity to speak* and ask questions and/or make comments; that is, they did not go there just to listen and be taught. In going to the synagogue, which was the nominal Jewish “church,” they were following the principle of “to the Jew first.” It was like our going to a Bible study meeting in which we can *participate and voice opinions*, yet we are respectful. In antitype, the nominal Church was rejected in 1878, but that does not mean that one who is accustomed to speaking on the truth could not go there under certain circumstances and address the assembly. To go to the nominal Church on a habitual basis would be wrong, however, unless there was a *constant* opportunity for input and expression.

Acts 13:15 And after the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.

Acts 13:16 Then Paul stood up, and beckoning with his hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience.

Notice what naturally happened. The rulers of the synagogue asked the two strangers if they had “any word of exhortation for the people” and perhaps also wanted to hear any news that would be of interest to the congregation. Also, they would want to know the thoughts of others of Jewry in regard to the passage of the Law just read. Paul stood up quickly and beckoned with his hand as if to say, “I have something of significance to say.” Then he spoke courageously, feeling the importance of the situation and the message, and knowing that God had anointed him, through Jesus, to be a special ambassador to the Gentiles.

Q: Paul began his address, “Men of Israel, and ye that fear God.” Based on verse 42, was he referring to both Jews and Gentiles? Verse 42 reads in part, “When the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath.”

A: Yes, these Gentiles either were already Jewish proselytes or were considering becoming Jewish proselytes. In other words, these Gentiles were searching for God and had a hearing ear for Judaism.

Acts 13:17 The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an high arm brought he them out of it.

Acts 13:18 And about the time of forty years suffered he their manners in the wilderness.

Acts 13:19 And when he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Chanaan, he divided their land to them by lot.

Acts 13:20 And after that he gave unto them judges about the space of four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet.

Acts 13:21 And afterward they desired a king; and God gave unto them Saul the son of Cis, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, by the space of forty years.

Acts 13:22 And when he had removed him, he raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will.

Acts 13:23 Of this man’s seed hath God according to his promise raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus:

Acts 13:24 When John had first preached before his coming the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel.

Acts 13:25 And as John fulfilled his course, he said, Whom think ye that I am? I am not he. But, behold, there cometh one after me, whose shoes of his feet I am not worthy to loose.

Over and over in verses 17-25, Paul emphasized the actions of *God* and eventually led to Messiah. Notice how shrewd Paul was. He wanted to appeal to the hearts of the Gentiles who were present in the audience as well as to the Jews. He started by telling how God called the Israelites when they were strangers in Egypt. Jacob's (Israel's) twelve sons, who died in Egypt, were the nucleus of the Jewish nation; that is, they became the twelve tribes. In fact, the twelve sons themselves are sometimes called "Jacob" and sometimes "Israel." In time and with a high arm, God brought the Israelites out of Egypt.

Paul was appealing to the hearts of those who were searching, both Jews and those Gentiles who were sympathetic to Jewry. Remember, Paul's commission was primarily to the Gentiles, but he was also to represent God to the natural seed. Therefore, his custom was to go to the Jew first and then to the Gentile, but sometimes he went to both Jew and Gentile right in the synagogue.

Next Paul mentioned two time periods that are very helpful in studying chronology: (1) the 40 years of wilderness wanderings in Sinai and (2) the 450 years of the Period of the Judges (from Joshua through Samuel). The account also states that Saul reigned as king for 40 years. Although Paul did not mention the six years of conquering the land of Canaan under Joshua, he did say the seven powers that occupied the land were dispersed.

Comment: Verse 18 is tender. For the clause God "suffered ... their [the Israelites'] manners in the wilderness," the King James margin says He fed them as a nurse beareth or feedeth her child.

Reply: Yes, in the sense of a shepherd or a mother eagle, the Heavenly Father watched over the Israelites. Even when they were disobedient, rather than to destroy them all in anger, He purged out the ringleaders, those who were the most disobedient. Instead of rashly consuming all of the people for their murmurings, He showed mercy to those who were trying. Eventually, however, He had to purge out the older generation except for Joshua and Caleb.

Of the kings of Israel, Paul mentioned only Saul, the son of Cis (Kish), and David, his purpose being to identify Jesus as the Son of David. He attacked this subject much as Stephen had but in a more abbreviated fashion. Then Paul backtracked to John the Baptist, who was well known even beyond the borders of Israel. Some of the Jews who had attended feasts in Jerusalem would have heard about John the Baptist and his message of a Savior, and they carried that news back to their homeland. The rumor about the Messiah spread like wildfire. Now Paul was saying, "What you heard is true. The Messiah John spoke about has come, and I am here to testify about him."

Although John the Baptist preached a strong message, he was humble, saying he was not worthy even to tie or loosen the sandals of the one he was introducing. Thus we can see that John bore the influence of his mother, Elisabeth. When she and Mary were both pregnant (with a six-month differential), Mary went to visit her. Upon seeing her, Elisabeth said, "I should welcome you, for the babe in my womb is jumping for joy over the one you are carrying, who will bring the promised redemption." Elisabeth, an *old* woman, humbled herself in giving recognition to Mary, a *young* woman (Luke 1:41-45 paraphrase).

Acts 13:26 Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent.

Acts 13:27 For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning him.

Acts 13:28 And though they found no cause of death in him, yet desired they Pilate that he should be slain.

Acts 13:29 And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre.

Acts 13:30 But God raised him from the dead:

Acts 13:31 And he was seen many days of them which came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses unto the people.

Acts 13:32 And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers,

Acts 13:33 God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.

Acts 13:34 And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David.

Acts 13:35 Wherefore he saith also in another psalm, Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.

Acts 13:36 For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption:

Acts 13:37 But he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption.

Comment: Verse 26 proves that Paul was addressing Gentiles as well as Jews, for the clause “whosoever among you feareth God” refers to the Gentiles who were present.

Paul’s address was not just a normal sermon. Just as Paul had beckoned earlier, he no doubt gesticulated with his hand now as he was talking, pointing to the people or the rulers as the words required. For example, when he said, “Whosoever among *you*,” he would have pointed. Paul was testifying that Jesus the Messiah was slain by the rulers of the synagogue, and the ruler of the synagogue here in Antioch had just invited him to speak. Paul did not hold back but was saying in effect that the rulership, the scribes and the Pharisees, were responsible for putting Jesus to death. However, after Jesus was taken down from the Cross and was resurrected, his body was never found. *Many witnesses saw him alive* after his crucifixion. When he was raised from death, he was seen by more than 500 on one occasion. Paul would have spoken *with real power, conviction, and urgency*. As a result, listeners knew that he *really believed* what he was saying. “The Scriptures *prove* that Jesus is the Messiah. In David’s tomb, there was a corpse; in Jesus’ tomb, there was *no corpse*. The Scriptures *prophesied* that God would not allow the body of His Son, who would be crucified, to see corruption.”

Paul’s words were carefully chosen. His delivery was not too verbose but was strong and just

right, for had the message been too long, it would have lost its effect. In Hebrew, the word “David” means “beloved,” and Paul was making a distinction between the two “beloveds.” The apostles had heard God’s voice saying, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,” so the “beloved” aspect was associated with Jesus (Matt. 3:17; 17:5). Paul was saying that from the lineage of the *natural* David would come the *Messiah* David, the greatly Beloved of God. Jesus was the *true Beloved* (Matt. 1:6,16). Paul was allowing the hearers to put the clues together later. Any intelligent person who had some familiarity with Old Testament history should have been able to make the connection. Paul was hitting the key points in order to open the door of their understanding.

Paul’s voice and body frame were weak, and his eyesight was poor—but his motions and expressions were *powerful and energetic*. The audience would have sensed his conviction and urgency, even if his voice was straining and not too loud. In other words, they could see that he was driven by *the urgency of his message* and that he was ready to show proof. Those with receptive hearts would be *moved* to consecration and want to hear more from this strange, wonderful itinerant preacher.

Acts 13:38 Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins:

Acts 13:39 And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.

Acts 13:40 Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets;

Acts 13:41 Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you.

Paul’s words about Isaiah’s and Habakkuk’s statements were like an electric shock to the listeners. He cautioned, “Beware! Although this message is new and hard to grasp, you must regard it carefully, for the prophets spoke of this future message and said that many would not receive it, even though a man declare it unto you.” In effect, Paul was saying, “I am that man. I am declaring the predicted message about the Messiah.”

Acts 13:42 And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath.

Acts 13:43 Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.

Paul reached the right-hearted Jews, Gentiles, and proselytes—that is, the ones whose hearts were opened by the Lord. Realizing that Paul would continue his journey, they sought him during the following week for as much information and understanding as possible, and they wished Paul a blessing in the words he had spoken to open up their minds (see King James margin). Barnabas participated after Paul spoke—similar to the way John followed up after Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost. John was a son of thunder, but he respected Peter and, therefore, was active afterwards (Mark 3:17).

Acts 13:44 And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God.

Acts 13:45 But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming.

“Almost the whole city” turned out to hear Paul on the next sabbath. This reaction shows how influential his message was on the first sabbath, plus the power of his additional preaching during the week just preceding. The synagogue ruler and his associates, who had never had such an audience, were *jealous*. For weeks and years, their numbers would have remained relatively constant. But now two strangers had come into their midst, and after the eight days that had just passed, nearly all in the city gathered together. Probably the multitude could not even fit in the synagogue. The radical difference aroused jealousy right away.

Acts 13:46 Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.

Comment: It is questionable whether these jealous Jewish rulers will get life in the Kingdom, for they were hardening their characters toward incorrigibility and judging themselves “unworthy of everlasting life.”

Reply: Now that they had received the knowledge, they were more responsible. *If they continued to pursue this course*—and some of them did as the New Testament shows—their characters became crystallized in incorrigibility, making it impossible for them to change their ways when they are awakened from the tomb in the Kingdom. Too much humbling would be required. In other words, one can become an incorrigible sinner in the present life whether or not a consecration is made. “Incorrigible” means “no hope of change.”

Notice that “Paul and Barnabas waxed bold” when the rulers contradicted their teachings. They did not return evil for evil but used *Scripture* and *Scriptural reasoning*. A submissive, meek message would not have been proper under the circumstances. Then Paul and Barnabas said to the opposing Jews, “Because you have thrust the gospel message from you, we now turn the message to the Gentiles.”

Acts 13:47 For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.

Acts 13:48 And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.

Because these Gentiles revered God and were searching, they were glad when they heard the words of Paul and Barnabas. In the Gentile world, with all of its numerous gods and heathen practices, they could not see a God whose character they could admire. Since the Jewish religion was the only religion that had any hope of an intelligent Creator with orderly laws, the Gentiles were attracted to Judaism. Now Paul was taking them a step higher.

The Gentiles “glorified the word of the Lord,” not the word of the Apostle Paul. They were awestruck with this new insight into the meaning of Scripture. “And as many [of the Gentiles] as were ordained to eternal life believed.” In other words, the Gentiles who were called to eternal life believed.

Q: Will the power that was manifested in the early Church again be manifested in the near future at the end of the age? Will there be startling conversions as well as powerful messages given?

A: For those who are Spirit-begotten in Babylon and are developed greatly in character, the knowledge of dispensational truth could come very swiftly. Years of studying the *Volumes*, for instance, would not be required. They could then respond and act upon the knowledge and be

greatly blessed.

Acts 13:49 And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region.

Acts 13:50 But the Jews stirred up the devout and honourable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts.

Acts 13:51 But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium.

Acts 13:52 And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost.

Influential Jews who were hostile to Paul and Barnabas and the gospel message went to others to stir up persecution. The instigating Jews, who were respected, were responsible for their actions, whereas the ones who were influenced and did not have an opportunity to actually hear Paul and Barnabas were not necessarily as responsible. The hostile Jews not only stirred up “the chief men of the city” but also “devout and honorable women,” knowing that women can get emotional and react strongly. Generally speaking, the Jewish women were far more educated than the Gentile women, and one reason they were considered “honorable” may have been their position as wives of the chief men of the city. The women were influenced by the hostile Jews, and they, in turn, influenced their husbands.

Notice what Paul and Barnabas did. When they were expelled, they followed Jesus’ advice and “shook off the dust of their feet” against the opposers. Then they departed from the city of Antioch and went to Iconium, leaving behind a nucleus of believers who could be developed at a later date. These disciples, being “filled with joy” and the Holy Spirit, went back to the Scriptures and studied afresh based on their new insight. Thus when they would subsequently hear from or of Paul, they would be ready for the next step of development. Paul and Barnabas left the brethren with much to reflect on in this new and wonderful life.

Acts 14:1 And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed.

Paul and Barnabas had been in Antioch, where they were successful at first but then had to flee and shake the dust off their feet. Now they were in Iconium. The “Greeks” were Gentile Jewish proselytes, the product of a mixed marriage, etc. Paul and Barnabas, two strangers, went into the synagogue and “so spake” in such a persuasive, effective, and earnest manner that a “great multitude” of both Jews and Gentiles believed. What a wonderful response on this initial occasion!

Acts 14:2 But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren.

While Paul and Barnabas were the leading spokesmen, other “brethren,” including probably Luke, accompanied them. The “Gentiles” who were stirred up by the unbelieving Jews were probably the “Greeks” of the preceding verse. This change in attitude shows that many people can be warm and responsive when they first hear the message of truth, but then others can undercut even the most powerful message with insidious remarks, false accusations, innuendoes, a questioning of the character of the speakers, and other forms of slander. After a joyous, trusting attitude and a great response, their minds were poisoned with evil. Acts 13:50 shows that one technique was to go after the women.

Acts 14:3 Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony

unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands.

Paul and Barnabas tried to undo the damage and did not give up easily. They spoke *boldly* and testified “unto the word of his grace.” The nature of their discourses, therefore, was along the lines of the love of God. The Creator is magnanimous in His concern for those He has created regardless of race or nationality or even religious views. There is a door of opportunity for life for all because of His love that was manifested in Christ. These words were very comforting.

God permitted Paul and Barnabas to have extraordinary power to perform “signs and wonders,” that is, miracles of healing and demonstrations of power such as casting out demons. Such miracles were necessary before the existence of a written Word. Even with Jesus, miracles were needed to call attention to his message. The experience of the Ethiopian eunuch with Philip the evangelist and the miraculous appearing of the glorified Lord to Saul were needed initially. A counterpart today, even with the Word of God, is that some have unusual experiences as individuals when they first come into the truth. No reasoning is required because the Lord’s overruling or intervention is so obvious. Later on, the experiences are different, generally speaking, and often a providence has to be studied in order to see the Lord’s hand in it.

Acts 14:4 But the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles.

The populace was divided in their opinions. Some sided with the unbelieving Jews who opposed Paul and Barnabas, and others sided with the “apostles.” Barnabas was “one sent,” and Paul was “one *specially* sent.” In other words, both were “apostles” in the sense of being blessed with the Holy Spirit to go on the missionary tour, but Paul was an *extraordinary* apostle.

Acts 14:5 And when there was an assault made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use them despitefully, and to stone them,

Acts 14:6 They were ware of it, and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about:

Acts 14:7 And there they preached the gospel.

The storm of opposition was of sufficient depth and rancor that Paul, Barnabas, and those with them felt it was prudent to move on. They left Iconium and went to nearby Lystra in the province of Lycaonia and then to Derbe and to the surrounding region, or suburban area. They preached the gospel in these places.

Q: Then do verses 4 and 5 show the following? Some Jews opposed Paul and Barnabas, and some Jews supported them. Some Gentiles opposed Paul and Barnabas, and some Gentiles supported them.

A: Yes. With the multitude being divided in their opinions, the reaction was similar to what will happen in the near future when the Elijah class smites the Jordan. In the type, the waters divided right and left, showing a division of sentiment, and Elijah and Elisha walked over dry-shod.

Acts 14:8 And there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother’s womb, who never had walked:

Acts 14:9 The same heard Paul speak: who stedfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed,

Acts 14:10 Said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked.

This man had been crippled from birth and had never walked. Of course the inhabitants of Lystra would have known about him because the infirmity had existed for so many years. It is interesting that Paul could perceive the faith and the intensity of this crippled man by the radiance and the joy that were reflected in his eyes as he listened to Paul speak. Following Jesus' usual method of healing on the basis of "according to your faith be it unto you," Paul could tell that this crippled man was not only a wonderful candidate, or subject who would respond, but that he would be useful to advertise the truth in that region (Matt. 9:29).

For the crippled man to stand up and walk and then all of a sudden jump up and down and not lose his balance was an astounding miracle. People who are confined to bed with a prolonged illness generally have trouble walking when they first get out of bed because they have not exercised. Now this man, who had been completely incapable of standing or walking, was healed in a dramatic fashion when Paul commanded, "Stand upright on thy feet."

We are reminded of the incident when Peter healed the lame beggar at the most prominent temple gate called "Beautiful" (Acts 3:1-11). The miracle proved to be a very powerful witness, but it eventually brought persecution.

Acts 14:11 And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men.

The healing was even more effective than Paul had anticipated. In fact, it was so effective that the populace considered Paul and Barnabas to be gods who had come down from heaven in human form, and they wanted to give homage.

The apostles and the brethren knew Greek, Hebrew, and probably Latin, but the "speech of Lycaonia" was a different dialect that they could not understand. To them, therefore, the emotional excitement with the dialect would have seemed almost like chattering monkeys or delirium. Consequently, there was a *delayed* reaction before the apostles and the brethren realized what was happening. Not until verse 14 does the account say, "When the apostles ... heard [*understood*] ... they rent their clothes," etc. In other words, they sensed the emotion but did not understand the situation at first.

Comment: *Reprint* No. 4369 says that according to tradition, Mercury and Jupiter had come sometime in the past and been rejected, causing punishment to come on the city. Therefore, when the people thought the gods had returned, they wanted to honor them.

Reply: There was a tradition in another city not far away with regard to the statue in the Temple of Diana. It was believed that a stone had fallen down from heaven and that the stone materialized as Diana. And in Egypt, the Pharaohs claimed to be begotten by a god of heaven through a human woman.

Acts 14:12 And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker.

Acts 14:13 Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people.

In the midst of the excitement, a wagon suddenly came to the city gates, where the miracle and the preaching had taken place. The city gates were important places in those days, for many things occurred there such as the sitting of judges, commerce, and bartering. Now oxen and

garlands were brought in a wagon to the city gates. The priest of Jupiter intended to kill the oxen for sacrifice unto the apostles.

Acts 14:14 Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out,

Acts 14:15 And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein:

Acts 14:16 Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways.

Notice how demonstrative Paul and Barnabas were. They *ran* in and out among the people, *shouting and rending their clothes*. They wanted to destroy any impression they were superior men. Thus they even ripped their clothing in an effort to break down any charisma that might come from their appearance. The people were so frenzied and delirious that they had to be counteracted in this way.

Evidently, Barnabas was impressive to look at, for he was likened to Jupiter, the chief god. He must have had a noble, serious, and serene appearance. Paul, the main speaker but with a less impressive appearance, was likened to Mercury, the chief messenger of the gods—something like the Logos but in a heathen sense.

Paul and Barnabas properly and *aggressively* tried to stop the delirium and the adulation. It is to their credit that they did not just act like stoics and try to make themselves immune to what was happening. They shouted, “Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God.” They were telling the people in effect, “Pay attention to *the real, the chief, the living, the invisible God*, and do not be so readily persuaded by signs, superstitions, and tradition.”

In verse 16, Paul and Barnabas said that God “in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways [and lusts].” Paul expressed a similar thought in his Epistle to the Romans when he said that God gave men over to reprobate minds when they turned away from worshipping the Creator (Rom. 1:28). God “winked” at men’s ignorance and transgressions; that is, He *permitted* evil but did not sanction it (Acts 17:30).

Comment: Verse 15, like many other Scriptures, shows that *God* is the Creator, not Jesus.

Reply: Yes, sometimes it is very hard—in fact, almost impossible—to teach those who are indoctrinated with certain preconceived opinions.

Acts 14:17 Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.

Paul tried to use common-sense, plain reasoning. When he told the people to give up their strange traditions, he did not want them to give up religious or elevated thinking but to consider matters from another standpoint. He was saying, “Consider God’s goodness *to all* and His handiwork over *all* creation. He provides rain, food, grass, sunshine, and all kinds of benefits. Look at what *God* has done and not at this worship of statues and idols.”

Acts 14:18 And with these sayings scarce restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them.

Despite all of the desperate efforts of Paul and Barnabas, the people were “scarce[ly]

restrained” from the evil of sacrificing *to men*. Although the people did not follow through on their intentions, they almost did. It is hard to reverse crowd emotionalism and hysteria.

Acts 14:19 And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead.

Acts 14:20 Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.

Trouble-making Jews came to Lystra from Antioch, where Paul had shaken the dust off his feet, and Iconium, from which he had fled because of persecution. These Jews were so effective in arousing the people of Lystra against Paul that *the very ones who had just wanted to worship Paul now opposed him*. The people exhibited an *exact opposite* attitude—going from an attitude of almost idolizing Paul and Barnabas to hating them and stoning Paul! Evidently, Barnabas was spared the stoning because of his appearance, and Paul was singled out because of his aggressive talk. The Jews felt that if they could stop Paul’s mouth, then they could stop the more-restrained Barnabas as well. In other words, Paul was considered the ringleader. We are reminded of Jesus’ popularity when he rode into Jerusalem on a white donkey at the end of his earthly ministry and was proclaimed by the multitudes, “Hosanna to the son of David” (Matt. 21:9). Several days later the people, incited by the chief priests, shouted, “Crucify him!” (Mark 15:13,14).

Comment: The situation may have been overruled by the Lord to permit only Paul’s stoning as retribution for his earlier part in Stephen’s stoning.

Reply: Yes, Paul had to have the retribution in the present life. When certain sins are committed with a certain degree of knowledge, the individual incurs responsibility. Adamic sin can be forgiven when proper steps are taken, but willful sins require stripes.

Even after the emotional frenzy had subsided in Lystra, the people continued to view Paul and Barnabas favorably for a few days—that is, until the Jews entered the city and launched their attack. The Adversary would have prompted the hateful attitude of the Jews, which was effective in turning the sentiments of the people.

Q: Were those trouble-making Jews following Paul and Barnabas?

A: They had probably gotten wind of the successful influence Paul and Barnabas were having in Lystra and then traveled there, being determined to stop the two.

Probably a few days elapsed after the people of Lystra had acclaimed Paul and Barnabas, just as five days elapsed with Jesus until the Crucifixion. Then Paul was *stoned, dragged out of the city* by a horse or mule, and *left as dead*. From a deep coma (“supposing he had been dead”), he miraculously revived. The word “disciples” in verse 20 shows that two or three other brethren besides Paul and Barnabas were present.

What a startling experience and reaction of Paul once again! When he revived, he returned to the *very city* where he had just been persecuted by the populace *almost unto death*. It is psychologically known that when a person is lynched and the furor dies down, those with any tender conscience at all realize the injustice and the enormity of the crime. The people had considered Paul dead. Imagine the stones hitting him and then his being left as a corpse! When he reentered the city, the people would have experienced fear and stricken consciences. But all these things aside, it was remarkable for Paul to go back into the same city, especially when he would still feel the wounds. Thus when Paul said, “I bear about in my body the *marks* of a slave of Jesus Christ,” his words were very meaningful (Gal. 6:17 paraphrase).

The next day Paul and Barnabas departed for Derbe. Paul's leaving at this point was proper and normal after having gone boldly back into the city. Jesus gave the principle that when a Christian is ill-treated, he should go on to another place. Paul was a *most unusual* person. In fact, he was so extraordinary that to compare any others to him would be most inappropriate. Next to Jesus, he was the most faithful of the brethren, being head and shoulders over even the other apostles, who were all extraordinary men themselves. Paul not only went back into the city but continued to preach, not knowing if he would be stoned again.

Comment: The people of Lystra must have been terrified when Paul reappeared. First, they thought he was a god, and he stopped them. Then they stoned him, and he came back to life, as it were. Now, *for sure*, some must have thought he was a god.

Reply: And Paul's leaving the city right away the next day was constructive, for he thus gave the people more opportunity to repent and to reflect on what they had done. If he had stayed and preached for a period of time, the whole incident would have been forgotten, but now those who favored Paul—those who had some grain of remorse or appreciation for what this remarkable person had done previously—felt a loss upon his departure.

Acts 14:21 And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch,

Paul and Barnabas backtracked to cities already visited. Originally, they had gone from Antioch to Iconium and then to Lystra and Derbe. Now they retraced their route, going backwards to the places they had started with.

Comment: This revisiting required courage because of previous persecuting experiences.

Acts 14:22 Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.

Acts 14:23 And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.

Acts 14:24 And after they had passed throughout Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia.

Acts 14:25 And when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down into Attalia:

Paul and Barnabas kept backtracking. They went back to confirm the converts in their faith and to encourage them to continue on in the narrow way. Notice that a big change occurred. On their return visits, Paul and Barnabas did not go to the synagogues but went instead to those who were receptive, to those who had a hearing ear. The disciples would have been strengthened in their own faith to see Paul's courage in returning to these cities. Paul's willingness to suffer persecution gave more and more credence to what he was preaching and showed that he and Barnabas were men of conviction who were not fearful of persecution because they believed *wholeheartedly* what they preached.

By example, Paul and Barnabas were saying, "Do not be surprised if at some point the Lord requires you to suffer what you saw us go through, for it is a part of the Christian learning experience." It would be interesting to know what Old Testament Scriptures were used to demonstrate the principle of suffering. Paul told those with a hearing ear that the Kingdom of God is entered "through *much* tribulation" (verse 22). Those who favorably responded to the truth were *really* interested. Of course the thought of persecution eliminated or prevented the less sincere from responding. Ephesus had more crown winners than any other period of the

Church, proportionately speaking. Stated conversely, Ephesus had fewer crown losers because in those days discipleship, as well as believing in the first place, cost something. Thus faith was sincere. Notice that Paul and Barnabas prayed and fasted (probably for more than a day) and then commended the elders to the Lord.

Q: We have a general rule not to elect novices as elders. Since there was not a long time lapse for the development of the brethren after Paul's first trip to these cities and his return, wouldn't two factors have come into play? (1) The brethren had unusual experiences that helped develop character quickly. (2) Paul could read the heart and hence could suggest who should be the elders.

A: Yes, and these "elders" may have been previous leaders who were misinformed—like Paul himself. They were selected because they had character and influence, because they sincerely believed this new gospel message, and because in living godly, they received persecution readily.

Q: Was there a stretching forth of the hands, or did Paul and Barnabas select the elders?

A: Probably Paul and Barnabas did the selecting. This infant church needed nourishment, so Paul and Barnabas did what they could in a limited time. Also, Paul knew he would be back.

Acts 14:26 And thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled.

Acts 14:27 And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles.

Acts 14:28 And there they abode long time with the disciples.

Paul was probably low-key and spoke very little about his own persecution, but those who accompanied him would have told of his experiences. Paul's conversation would have enthusiastically focused on the wonderful open door of opportunity for witnessing to Gentiles in harmony with Peter's vision of the sheet with clean and unclean animals.

Acts 15:1 And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.

New converts would have been confused by the message from those longer consecrated that circumcision according to the Law was essential for salvation. To be unmoved by this improper doctrine, one had to be consecrated for a while and stabilized in the truth. If many Christian Jews who firmly believed in the gospel but did not understand the real kernel of the matter were overcome by this wrong doctrine, how hard it was for *new* converts! Paul was concerned about the problem, and fortunately, he was in the region.

Acts 15:2 When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.

Paul and Barnabas disputed earnestly and strongly with Jewish Christians who advocated circumcision, for silence would have given assent. Other brethren urged Paul and Barnabas to return to Jerusalem to discuss the matter with the rest of the apostles and the elders. One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the early Church was *discernment*, the ability to mechanically express a *right doctrine*. Another gift was the ability to grasp the *mature thinking or principle*. Still another gift was being able to utter a prophecy or a *suggestion*—in this case for a little committee

consisting of Paul, Barnabas, and certain others to go back to Jerusalem “about this question” and thus nip the wrong doctrine in the bud.

Comment: It is interesting that in this *same* chapter, two disputes are mentioned. First, Paul and Barnabas were on the same side of the issue, disputing with the Judaizing brethren. Later Paul and Barnabas had their own dispute, so this is a good chapter to teach principle. Where principle is involved, two brethren might have to oppose one another, even if they have been very close.

It was “no small dissension and disputation.” In other words, it was an *animated* discussion. There would have been no bitterness, however, for Paul and Barnabas were both strong and good characters. Their dispute here for the right doctrine not only helped at the moment but also helped the Church subsequently. They demonstrated the principle that it would be very wrong to remain quiet on an important issue and reason as follows: “I will not get into argumentative disputation but will let love and peace prevail. Let every man be persuaded in his own mind.”

The issue of circumcision was important because it went to the root of the doctrine of *justification by faith* and being saved by God’s grace. This doctrine was a matter of *principle*. If circumcision were made mandatory, other features of the Law would soon be added, putting the Christian more and more under bondage. The result would be justification by *works*, not by grace. Therefore, a little committee (Paul, Barnabas, and others) went back to Jerusalem to resolve this burden that was on their minds.

Acts 15:3 And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren.

In traveling down to Jerusalem, Paul, Barnabas, and certain other brethren went first through Phoenicia (Lebanon), then through Samaria (northern Israel), and on to Judea. En route to Jerusalem, they told the brethren they met about their wondrous experiences with Gentile conversions on the missionary tour. All rejoiced to hear how the gospel had blossomed out into the Gentile field. Of course they would have wisely refrained from talking about the circumcision problem and waited for the Jerusalem conference for a resolution.

“Being brought on their way by the church” means that other brethren financed the journey back to Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas were dependent either upon freewill offerings or on Paul’s working as a tent maker, which would have taken time. Seeing the importance of their getting to Jerusalem quickly, the brethren helped Paul and Barnabas financially and provided lodging and other temporal needs.

Acts 15:4 And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them.

When they got to Jerusalem, they were received by the brethren, and they again told of the Gentile conversions. Meanwhile, arrangements were made for the conference.

Acts 15:5 But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.

Certain believing Pharisees reiterated the requirement for circumcision, wanting the brethren “to keep the law of Moses.” In other words, when certain Jews with a pharisaical background became Christians, they brought some of that strict thinking with them. Not only did they feel their thinking was superior, but superficially it seemed plausible. Advocates felt that the gospel

was a furthering or an extension of the Law—that they were being brought up to a higher plateau. They did not realize that the higher plateau was separate from and not based on the Law. The thought that the Christian was to keep both the Law and the gospel sounded very good from the standpoint of *human reasoning*.

The real issue here was *circumcision* because Abraham was circumcised *before the Law*. Then the Law was given with the requirement for circumcision on the eighth day after birth. The situation back there was something like Christians in our day saying that a Christian must have water baptism in order to be saved. Moreover, these pharisaical Christian Jews were *aggressive—they demanded* circumcision.

This problem with some Jewish Christians shows the difficulty of trying to get rid of past indoctrinations and backgrounds. Even those in some Protestant sects, such as the Mennonites and the Amish, find it hard to have a compassionate, flexible attitude toward others because of their background and training. A strong parental influence can also be an obstacle. It is hard to undo past training.

Acts 15:6 **And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter.**

Apostles and elders came together to consider the matter of circumcision. Regular believers were not included because the desire was to have *mature* thinking on this subject. Of course the words of the apostles would be given greater priority.

Comment: The *Expanded Biblical Comments* say, “The truth has nothing to lose by fairness, openness, and a reasonable moderation and the turning on of *all light obtainable*.” That is a good attitude to have, especially as the light shines brighter and brighter.

Reply: Such an attitude requires *faith in Divine Providence* to overrule the matter.

Acts 15:7 **And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe.**

Peter did not take a leading role in the beginning by directing the questions, etc. Instead he exercised patience and let the others speak awhile before rising up. It was wise to allow some thrashing out first, back and forth, back and forth. When he finally stood up and called attention to the conversion of the Gentiles, many would be interested to hear his thinking.

Comment: Although Paul and Barnabas were there, Peter and James did the speaking.

Reply: That was the proper attitude on the part of Paul and Barnabas. Although not prohibited from speaking, they used decorum and did not go to Jerusalem with the attitude “We will straighten out this matter and the brethren.” There were twelve apostles, not just Paul, and not being heady, he trusted the Holy Spirit to correct the problem and bring unanimity.

Paul was selected by God to be the minister to the Gentiles, but Peter reminded those who were assembled that God had initially given him the keys of heaven to both Jews and Gentiles. In other words, Peter opened the door to the Gentiles, but Paul was the leading apostle of the Gentiles. Peter’s words showed that Paul was not prejudiced to favor the Gentiles, for God had directed Peter earlier in regard to Cornelius. Peter said, “A good while ago God made choice among us, that ... by my mouth [the Gentiles] should hear the [opening of the] word of the gospel [to Cornelius], and believe.”

Q: Why was the address “Men and brethren” frequently used?

A: Although the apostles and the elders made the decisions, other brethren would have been present. However, an open invitation was not issued to the brethren in general in Jerusalem, for a smorgasbord of believers and their variant views would have resulted in more confusion and indecision than when the conference started. The arrangement was for the apostles and the elders to meet, but others were not prohibited from attending.

Acts 15:8 And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us;

Acts 15:9 And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.

The pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the Gentiles was a practical, pragmatic evidence that God had accepted them, and He gave them not only the Holy Spirit but also a manifestation of tongues.

Acts 15:10 Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?

Jesus' yoke is easy (Matt. 11:30). In contrast, the yoke of the Law is heavy and burdensome because of the imperfection of the flesh. With the gospel, grace can enter in with a certain degree of penance, humility, and proper progressive steps.

Comment: Paul said, "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage" (Gal. 5:1).

Reply: The "yoke of bondage" is the yoke of the Law. Conscientious people could be depressed even to the extent of suicide if they felt there was no way to get out from under that yoke.

Acts 15:11 But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.

Verse 11 shows Peter's growth in his understanding of grace and faith. Now he was a stalwart in these fundamentals of the Christian life.

Acts 15:12 Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them.

The "multitude" would have included not just the elders and the apostles but other brethren as well. Before the conference was over, there was quite a gathering. However, the discussions on circumcision were between the elders and the apostles, with the apostles' having the major say.

Paul and Barnabas declared "what miracles and wonders [gifts of the Holy Spirit] God had wrought among the Gentiles by them."

Acts 15:13 And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me:

James Alphaeus had the last word. Evidently, he had real talent as a chairman. On the ecclesia level, a deacon, for instance, may have a special talent for conducting a business meeting. Feeling the matter of circumcision should be brought to a resolution, James began, "Men and brethren, hearken unto me."

Acts 15:14 Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.

Acts 15:15 And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written,

Acts 15:16 After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up:

Acts 15:17 That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things.

James quoted from the Old Testament: “In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: That they may possess ... all the heathen, which are called by my name, saith the LORD that doeth this” (Amos 9:11,12). The key words used by James are “*after this*”; that is, after the calling of a sufficient number of Gentiles, after the Church is complete, would come the repairing of the covenant relationship with Israel along natural lines. These verses would be only a summary of what James said on that occasion.

The calling of the Gentiles agreed with Scripture. After the Gentiles have been called out as a people for God’s name, the Jewish nation will be built again under the New Covenant. James was saying in effect, “You should not be so surprised about the Gentiles because God’s plan is to reconcile the world, the ‘residue of men.’ The Gentiles are in God’s plan in both the Gospel Age and the Millennial Age.”

Acts 15:18 Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.

In other words, with His omniscient powers, God *foresaw* this development with the Gentiles. In fact, He made arrangements for and approved of the Gentiles’ coming in long, long in advance. Because of the Old Testament Scriptures and prophecies, Jewish Christians should not have been surprised but should have accepted this development. Here is a good example of how we have to *grow* in our understanding of the deep things of God lest we react like zombies and our minds fail to grasp important details. This principle is especially true with regard to prophetic truths, which are dispensationally understood when the due time comes.

Acts 15:19 Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God:

Acts 15:20 But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood.

Acts 15:21 For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day.

James listed four categories that Christians were to abstain from: (1) pollutions of idols, (2) fornication, (3) things strangled, and (4) blood. Notice that verse 21 gives the proper slant or basis to verse 20. James was saying that these issues were very important because to ignore them would offend or cause a stumbling block for Orthodox Jews, who read from the Old Testament every week and gave explanations and thus were familiar with the Law. To disobey the prohibition in any of these four categories would raise unnecessary trouble. Abstaining from the four categories would help to *minimize* contention, but of course it would not eliminate contention altogether. Let us consider the four categories one by one.

Category 1: “Pollutions of idols” referred primarily to the practice of offering meat to idols and

then selling it to the people at reduced rates. After the temple services, the leftover meat was brought out into the open market adjoining the temple for public sale; that is, the cheapest meat was sold at heathen temples, which had a butcher shop convenient for the worshippers, and the revenue from the sale of the meat went into the temple coffers. Just as the Jews brought animals to the Temple in Jerusalem to offer to the Lord and could eat part of those animals depending on the nature of the sacrifice and even take some of the meat home, so heathen religions had similar practices except that they were grotesque and were accompanied by defiling practices.

What was the temptation to Christians? After the meat was offered to idols, it was sold at the common market. Under the Law, the Jews gave meat to their priesthood, but the Law was typical and constructive and had wholesome lessons, whereas the heathen religions were mixed up. The meat brought to heathen temples was so abundant that the excess was sold at bargain prices in the common market to enrich the temple treasuries. For believers to knowingly buy such meat was wrong, for others would observe the practice and get the wrong lesson. Another example is that a Christian should not go into a bar, even if he is not drinking, for others might see him and draw the wrong conclusion. Christians are to avoid even the *appearance* of evil. Paul said that offering meat to an idol did not change the meat one iota, but eating such meat could affect the consciences of the brotherhood.

Because of the other Jews, Christians were not to knowingly buy meat that had been offered to idols. When Paul went into Gentile territories on his missionary journeys, he first looked for Jews. When the preaching there caused problems, he turned his message to the Gentiles. Since eating meat offered to idols would have hindered his witnessing, it was prudent to abstain from such meat. However, if a Christian was the only believer in an area and had Paul's understanding, he could buy the cheaper meat, for in that case, there would be no danger of stumbling brethren.

Applying this principle today, we should be sensitive to the consciences of other Christians and forgo something rather than to stumble them. Paul was not saying that Christians should be vegetarians for the rest of their lives but that they should abstain from the eating of meat *in that circumstance*. James gave practical advice for conditions back there in the early Church. Today we do not have the same conditions.

Comment: Paul reasoned that in cases where it was not clear whether meat had been offered to idols, one did not have to ask questions and dig into the matter (1 Cor. 10:25). That way the conscience was not defiled.

Reply: Yes, the meat could be obtained secondhand, and in that case, there was no need to ask questions. The point is that we should be careful not to defile the conscience of other Christians. For example, if one had a Catholic statue before he consecrated, he should get rid of it, even though he is not using the statue now, lest he hurt the conscience of another Christian. Based on that principle, the newly converted Christians in Ephesus burned their mystical (occult) books (Acts 19:18,19).

Category 2: "Fornication" was listed separately to clarify the situation. Because fornication was mixed in with heathen worship, it had to be emphasized as an evil. Christians had to put this sin behind them! Many groups saw nothing wrong with prostitution right in the temple, especially in parts of Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. Men paid money to the vestal virgins, the prostitutes, etc., and the money was put in the temple coffers. The flesh liked this practice and justified it as holy. One foot was in heaven, and the other foot was on earth.

The clarification was needed that Jehovah was a *holy* God and that the individual had to be separate from the flesh, separate from these former practices. Fornication, which is more

inclusive than adultery, is *illicit and abnormal relationships* including homosexuality. Back in the apostles' day, fornication was not seen as something so terrible. Docetists in the early Church immersed themselves in fornication to the highest degree, deluding themselves into thinking that this practice manifested their hatred and disgust for it. Whom were they fooling? Some had the nerve to preach Docetism, and they were getting away with it because such thinking was compatible with the former life of a number of brethren. Stated another way, practices from the past were carried into the Christian religion. Therefore, it was the responsibility of Paul and the other apostles to show that Christians should keep themselves separate from the evil. Just as the Jews were steeped in the Law for centuries, so the Gentiles were steeped in immorality for centuries, and that tie had to be broken.

Incidentally, what is peculiar today in regard to homosexuality is that it is becoming acceptable to society through the general increase of knowledge. Back in heathen countries in Paul's day, ignorance prevailed, most of the people worked like serfs, and there was no Bible, so the practice was more excusable. But today almost everyone has a Bible, so there is more responsibility. Moreover, there are historical records of what happened to past generations and how societies collapsed when immorality took over, but who pays attention to history today? We can see how the United States is going into decay and ruin. Conditions are getting worse and worse.

Comment: Paul spoke strongly to the Corinthians: "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

Category 3: "Things strangled." Strangling or breaking the neck, the common method of killing an animal for food, kept the blood in the animal. Meat is tastier with the blood in it, and strangling was less messy than draining the blood Orthodox style. If the next verse, verse 21, had not been included, we would still have to get kosher meat without the blood today, but the situation changed. Up until AD 70, the four categories of prohibition applied as set forth in the conference. (Of course it goes without saying that fornication is always prohibited.)

Not only did the Gentiles feel that killing animals by strangling enhanced the value of the meat, but they saw nothing wrong with the practice. To the Jew, however, strangling was a sin because the Law taught that the blood of the animal had to be drained.

Vegetarians use verse 20 but ignore verse 21. However, Paul straightened out the matter: "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17). Christians were not to buy polluted meat offered publicly at the temple store, for others watching would know the meat had been offered to idols and their conscience would be affected. Paul said that Christians who are insensitive to the consciences of others will not make the Kingdom, so we must be careful. Along another line, it is not wrong for a Christian to have a gun. What the gun *is used for* is the determining factor.

Category 4: "Blood" was the practice of drinking blood, especially in orgies and cults. Blood was also used with rituals, as in Bacchus worship. With kosher meat, the practice was to hang the animal by the feet and let the blood drain out. However, strictly speaking, it was impossible to get all of the blood out, so some blood was eaten anyway. The point is that the Lord intended the prohibition against eating blood to be a *type*, for without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins (Heb. 9:22). Therefore, He instituted the literal letting of blood of the animal for the benefit of what it pictured. Those who are sticklers should realize that with some of the things they are straining at, they are "swallow[ing] a camel" (Matt. 23:23,24). Many of the

commandments in the Law are acts of obedience to show reverence for God. About 95 percent of the commandments have either a health or a practical value.

In Europe during the Middle Ages, the people in several countries commonly drank blood, thinking it made them ferocious. And the strange thing is that the blood actually did affect them, making them rough and tough and degrading them. If a dog bites a chicken and happens to get the taste of blood, that dog is changed forever. No longer just a playful pet, it becomes ferocious. Not only is the taste of blood unique, but it breeds cannibalism and violence and feeds the lower man at the sacrifice of the nobler qualities.

Acts 15:22 Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren:

As a result of the conference, the Jerusalem church sent at least two witnesses (Judas Barsabas and Silas) to accompany Paul and Barnabas and report that the letter being carried was authentic (Acts 15:27).

Acts 15:23 And they wrote letters by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia:

The letter began by stating that it came from the apostles, elders, and brethren of the Jerusalem church. It was addressed to believers (both Jews and Gentiles) in Gentile lands, of which Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia were specifically named. Cilicia was the province Paul had come from.

Acts 15:24 Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment:

Acts 15:25 It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,

Acts 15:26 Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Acts 15:27 We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth.

The pronoun “you” in verse 27 refers to brethren among the Gentiles, that is, those to whom the letter was addressed.

Acts 15:28 For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things;

Acts 15:29 That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.

The immoral conditions so permeated the customs in the various Gentile lands that without guidelines, it was almost impossible to avoid an entanglement of some kind. Thus the distinct enumeration of four categories assisted the brethren in what particularly to avoid in their conduct. The letter curbed the Gentile brethren more than the Jews, for the Jews were accustomed to abstaining from these things. However, because of their background, the

Gentiles actually had a better grasp than the Jews of the liberty they had as Christians. Nevertheless, the letter enjoined the Gentiles to be very careful not to use any liberty that might cause irreparable harm to the brotherhood. For example, whether or not meat was offered to an idol really did not affect the meat, but in his epistles, Paul counseled the brethren to be considerate of the feelings of other brethren. In hearing this letter, the Jewish Christians realized that they had to submit and welcome Gentiles into the Church of Christ on a level with themselves as long as the Gentile Christians abstained from these four categories.

Acts 15:30 So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle:

“They” refers to Paul and Barnabas.

Acts 15:31 Which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation.

The letter was read to the Antioch brethren first, and “they rejoiced for the exhortation” (see King James margin). Antioch was a convenient meeting place for those who lived in Cilicia and Syria, so when the brethren from these areas came to Antioch, they were shown the letter. When Paul left Antioch to visit other Gentile regions, he took the letter with him and read it in the various places (Acts 16:4).

Acts 15:32 And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them.

All four were notable for preaching: Paul, Barnabas, Judas, and Silas. Through their gift of the Holy Spirit, Judas and Silas were prophets. One reason they were specially “chosen” by the Jerusalem brethren may have been that very gift of the Spirit (Acts 15:22,25). The Jerusalem brethren would have felt this gift enabled Judas and Silas to exhort and thus supplement the letter. The reason given in the letter was that these men had “hazarded [risked] their [very] lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 15:26). In other words, they did not just profess to be believers, but their actions confirmed their professions.

Acts 15:33 And after they had tarried there a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto the apostles.

Acts 15:34 Notwithstanding it pleased Silas to abide there still.

Judas and the other brethren (except Silas) returned to the apostles in Jerusalem. In other words, brethren other than Judas and Silas had accompanied Paul and Barnabas from Jerusalem, but these two were the chief witnesses.

Acts 15:35 Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.

Acts 15:36 And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do.

Acts 15:37 And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark.

Acts 15:38 But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work.

Acts 15:39 And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus;

Acts 15:40 And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God.

Acts 15:41 And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches.

Paul and Barnabas had *no ill will* toward each other with the “sharp” contention and subsequent separation. They simply were at loggerheads, and neither would yield. And no doubt each considered the matter a *principle*. With Barnabas, there was a family tug because John Mark was a nephew.

At one time, Barnabas was regarded as more important than Paul. It took a little time for Paul to emerge as head and shoulders over the others in understanding. In the beginning of the letter, Barnabas was mentioned first, showing deference and appreciation of him by the brethren on a longer-term basis (Acts 15:25). Not only did he have a comforting, peacemaking disposition, but he was called Jupiter on a previous occasion because he had a better physical appearance and looked more like a patriarch (Acts 14:12). Evidently, he had a serene and mature demeanor. Paul’s lesser appearance and weaker voice helped to keep him humble, and this quality was important, especially since he will be the chief apostle in the Kingdom.

Paul had said (paraphrased), “Let us go and visit *every city* where we preached the Word and see how the brethren are doing.” Therefore, after the dissension, Paul and Silas went to Syria and Cilicia, and Barnabas and John Mark went to Cyprus. That location was an additional tug with Barnabas because he was originally from Cyprus. Although the Scriptures do not mention Paul and Barnabas as being together again subsequently, there was no enmity between them. They just were not close associates thereafter. Paul’s second missionary journey was starting now.

Acts 16:1 Then came he to Derbe and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek:

Acts 16:2 Which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium.

Acts 16:3 Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek.

Timothy had a Jewish mother and a Greek father. Although young, he was very zealous and “well reported of by the brethren.” Paul wanted Timothy to enter the work and go with Silas and him. In this regard, Paul thought it would be wise for Timothy to be circumcised because, having a Jewish mother, he would be considered a Jew. Circumcision was *not essential* now that Timothy was a Christian, but for the sake of expediency, it would be helpful in witnessing to Jews. Otherwise, Timothy might be a stumbling stone. To repeat, it was *not wrong* for Paul to have Timothy circumcised *because others were not pressuring or commanding* Timothy and saying that circumcision was necessary for a Christian. A Jew in Christ was like a Gentile in Christ. There was no difference.

The circumstances were different with Titus, who was a Greek, a *Gentile* (Gal. 2:3-5). Therefore, it was better that Titus not be circumcised, even privately, for word would spread, and the implication would be that circumcision was essential for a Christian. Paul received a lot of pressure in regard to Titus, but it was wrong to insist that he undergo the procedure. With his great intellect and knowledge, Paul was eventually able to influence many brethren to reason correctly, but in the beginning, it was hard to counteract cultural thinking.

Acts 16:4 And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem.

Acts 16:5 And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily.

Acts 16:6 Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia,

Acts 16:7 After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not.

Acts 16:8 And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas.

Paul and Silas read the Jerusalem council letter in all the cities they visited; hence it was read beyond Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia, to whom the letter was addressed (Acts 15:23). Since Antioch had a number of Gentile converts, the problem concerning circumcision was seen as being there, but actually the problem was widespread.

After visiting all of the cities where they had preached on the first missionary tour, Paul went to new places instead of returning to Antioch. He wanted to go up into the heartland of Asia towards Ararat, but twice the Holy Spirit stopped him, possibly by an auricular pronouncement by Silas, who was a prophet, or else by an obvious providence. Asia Minor is present-day Turkey. Asia proper is now Turkey, Ararat, India, Russia, etc. The Lord overruled that Paul went to Troas, which was on the coast of the Aegean Sea.

Acts 16:9 And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.

Acts 16:10 And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them.

Acts 16:11 Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis;

Acts 16:12 And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days.

In Troas, Paul received a night vision that called him to Macedonia—and specifically to the chief city, Philippi. Notice the promptness with which Paul obeyed the vision—he left for Macedonia “*immediately*.” In the vision, a man of Macedonia appeared to Paul and urged him to come to Macedonia and help there. The man in the vision could have appeared as the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:23).

Acts 16:13 And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither.

Acts 16:14 And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.

Acts 16:15 And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.

Since there was no synagogue in Philippi, a *Roman* city, Paul sought the Jews on the sabbath in the place where they met, which was outside the city by a river. There, outdoors, “prayer was wont [accustomed] to be made” by the riverside. Paul and those accompanying him sat down and spoke to the women who were gathered there.

Comment: For the first time, Paul specifically sought out a group of women.

Reply: Evidently, women were more in the habit of praying. Praying women are mentioned several times in the Old Testament.

Lydia, a seller of purple, was from Thyatira. Being temporarily away from home indicates that she was a merchant and evidently a person of means. Perhaps she had a second residence in Philippi. She quickly grasped the message, responded wholeheartedly, and was baptized. Subsequently, she constrained Paul and Silas to stay at her home. Although Paul was an apostle, it was proper for him not to take hospitality for granted, and he waited until Lydia insisted. Similarly, when Jesus walked on the Sea of Galilee, he ignored the apostles until they called out to him, “Master, save us!” (Mark 6:48-51).

Notice that the Lord opened her heart, and “she attended unto the things” that Paul spoke. We are reminded of Mary, the sister of Lazarus, who sat at the feet of Jesus (Luke 10:39). There are other similarities between Jesus and Paul. For instance, Paul sat by the river and talked to Lydia, and Jesus sat by a well and talked to the woman of Samaria. The similarities give us some idea of conditions back there.

Lydia’s influence is shown by the fact that her *whole* household was baptized. She had wealth, respect, servants, etc., but in addition, she was noble and reverent.

Acts 16:16 And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying:

Acts 16:17 The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation.

Acts 16:18 And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour.

Verses 16-18 describe another incident that occurred in Philippi. “A certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination ... followed Paul and us [Silas and Luke], and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation.” And this she did for many days. If we put ourselves in Paul’s place, we can see what a distraction the young woman was. At first, the possessed damsel’s words sounded complimentary for Paul, and her spirit of divination was considered a mystic power of perception. She was saying that Paul and the others taught the way of salvation. Why, therefore, was it proper for Paul to cast out the demon when the message was *true*? (1) If the damsel’s message was allowed to persist, Paul might use it as an aid to his ministry. The situation was like Jesus’ being tempted to cast himself off the pinnacle of the Temple. The Scriptures do say that the angels would protect him lest he dash his foot against a stone, so Jesus could have reasoned, “This suggestion by the Adversary will help to publicize my ministry,” but in both cases, Satan’s strategy was wrong. (2) Paul knew that a demoniac spirit was prompting the damsel to say these things. (3) Based on the final results of this experience (Acts 16:29-34), Satan may have planned the whole scenario, for he would not mind sacrificing some of his own followers if he could accomplish something that would be damaging to the Lord’s cause. In other words, it may have been Satan’s strategy to

cause the possessed damsel to speak a message of truth, for he knew that the result would be the imprisonment of Paul and Silas.

Comment: We are reminded of the occasion when Jesus cast evil spirits into a herd of swine. The swine ran off a cliff and drowned. The owners, instead of rejoicing at the cured man, were angry at Jesus for the death of their animals. Satan arranged this incident in advance to bring persecution on Jesus.

Reply: Yes, the Adversary is a cunning, wily mastermind with ulterior motives.

“Paul, being grieved, [finally] turned and said to the [fallen] spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he [the fallen spirit] came out the same hour.” Paul ignored the damsel for “many days” but eventually had to act by exorcising the damsel.

Q: Instead of “divination” in verse 16, the King James margin has “Python,” a proper name. The damsel was “possessed with a spirit of Python.” Verse 18 reads, “Paul ... said to the spirit,” as if he was addressing a personality. Therefore, is verse 16 referring by name to a particular fallen angel?

A: Yes, Python would be a fallen angel—and probably one of the Adversary’s chief personalities. A “python” is a snake, and in Satanic worship, vulgar and repulsive titles are used, Python being an example. To us, the names are repulsive but not to those who are cultured in the occult and in tradition. For instance, one of the symbols of the Roman Empire was a dragon, which is a serpent or a snake. Dragons are generally portrayed in a repugnant fashion with big teeth and fire coming out of their mouth, but to a mind indoctrinated in evil or the occult, these characteristics are attractive.

Satan does not compromise the evil he loves but has his cultists address him knowingly as Satan and as the author of evil, lasciviousness, and so forth. To Satan, such titles or identifying marks are flattery and praise, and he accepts them boldly.

Comment: The word “spirit” in verse 16 is the Greek *pneuma*, that is, an *invisible power*. The verse would thus read, “A certain damsel possessed with an invisible power of Python ... brought her masters [plural] *much gain* by soothsaying.”

Reply: She had quite a reputation and great mystical capabilities through the knowledge of the fallen angels, particularly in this case.

Acts 16:19 And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers,

Acts 16:20 And brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city,

Acts 16:21 And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans.

Acts 16:22 And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them.

We get a little clue here as to why there was no synagogue in Philippi, a Roman city, namely, because of animosity toward the Jews. To say to the populace and the magistrates, “These men are Jews,” was like waving a red flag. The people had no qualms about flogging Jews. The magistrates tore the clothes off Paul and Silas to beat them.

Comment: “Masters” (plural) means that the damsel had at least two owners but probably more for them to have drawn Paul and Silas to the magistrates. The damsel’s powers would have supported them all in a lavish way.

Acts 16:23 And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailer to keep them safely:

Paul and Silas were beaten with many stripes and then cast into prison. The jailer was charged “to keep them safely”; that is, he was charged with his *life*.

Acts 16:24 Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks.

Acts 16:25 And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them.

Acts 16:26 And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one’s bands were loosed.

The Philippian jailer was evidently charged in strong terms for the security of Paul and Silas, and for that reason, he took them into the “inner[most] prison,” into the depths of the dungeon, as it were. In addition, he double-locked them by having their feet fastened in stocks. His life was on the chopping block if they escaped.

Comment: Meanwhile, the backs of Paul and Silas were ribbons of flesh from the beating.

At midnight, Paul and Silas prayed and sang hymns. Why “midnight”? During the daytime, they were weakened from being dragged to the prison, thrown down, manhandled, and put in stocks. Midnight, therefore, was probably the hour they started to recover from the beatings. As they revived, they used their strength to pray and sing, in spite of their bleeding backs. Instead of complaining, they *rejoiced* for the persecution, as Jesus had enjoined, and showed FAITH (Matt. 5:11,12). The prisoners, who would have seen Paul and Silas coming into the prison in a wretched state, now heard them *praying and singing*. How remarkable!

Comment: God must have overruled in advance to make sure that at least one of them had a good singing voice that would carry.

Reply: With Paul having a weaker voice, perhaps Silas carried the tune.

A *great earthquake suddenly* shook the prison to its foundations, opening *all* doors and loosing the bands of *all* prisoners! (We are reminded of an earlier incident, in which Peter’s chains fell off while he was in prison—Acts 12:7.) The prisoners, immobilized in shock and fear, did not escape but stayed there. They had just heard singing that praised God, and suddenly a *great shaking* showed that God was angry at the prison keeper. They were stunned. Paul and Silas were in the inner prison and the gates or doors opened all the way out to where the jailer was sleeping.

The prison keeper had taken his “charge” so seriously that he had put Paul and Silas in the *innermost* part of the dungeon and fastened their feet in stocks. Now the doors were open all the way to the outer gate.

Comment: It was a selective earthquake, for the ceiling did not come down on their heads.

Acts 16:27 And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled.

Being outside at the outer gate, the prison keeper had probably not heard the singing. In the poor illumination, he could see the open doors, but he could not see into the cells. Fearing that the prisoners had escaped, he was ready to commit suicide, for he knew the Roman authorities would kill him for failing to keep Paul and Silas and the others secure.

Acts 16:28 But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here.

But Paul cried from the *inner* part of the prison with a *loud* voice, “Do not kill yourself, for we are all here.” Although Paul could not have seen the jailer at this point, he responded under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 16:29 Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas,

Acts 16:30 And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?

Acts 16:31 And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.

Acts 16:32 And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house.

Acts 16:33 And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway.

Acts 16:34 And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.

As the jailer brought Paul and Silas out, he would have closed the doors behind them to keep the other prisoners there in jail. The fact he needed a light shows that Paul and Silas had been singing and praying in the dark. Incidentally, Luke, the recorder, was spared, for Paul and Silas were the ones doing the preaching. Notice that not only the jailer but also *all of his household* were converted.

Q: Wasn't it unusual for Paul to say, “Believe on [into] the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, *and your house*” *before* he had even met the members of the jailer's household?

A: That is why the man in the earlier night vision telling Paul to “come over into Macedonia, and help *us [plural]*” may have been the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:9). Then Paul would have recognized the jailer as that man.

Comment: Paul might have recognized the jailer as he was brought into the prison. Then he would have pondered and prayed to know what the providence meant: “Lord, what would you have me do regarding this jailer?”

Acts 16:35 And when it was day, the magistrates sent the sergeants, saying, Let those men go.

Acts 16:36 And the keeper of the prison told this saying to Paul, The magistrates have sent to let you go: now therefore depart, and go in peace.

When the sergeants (a lower form of magistrates) got word of what had happened in the prison, they would have run and told the magistrates. The sergeants may even have said that the jailer washed the wounds of Paul and Silas and fed them. And no doubt the earthquake that mightily shook the prison shook the city environs as well. Hence the magistrates were frightened and wanted to get Paul and Silas out of the city, and they knew the two had been preaching about God. Paul and Silas had been thought of as lowly Jews and troublemakers, but now the magistrates were terrified.

Acts 16:37 But Paul said unto them, They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison; and now do they thrust us out privily? nay verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out.

Acts 16:38 And the sergeants told these words unto the magistrates: and they feared, when they heard that they were Romans.

Acts 16:39 And they came and besought them, and brought them out, and desired them to depart out of the city.

When the prison keeper told Paul that the magistrates were releasing Silas and him, Paul used an interesting strategy, saying, "We are Romans, and they beat us while we were uncondemned." (Silas was a Roman too, and Paul's words show how Roman citizens were favored.) Paul then insisted that the magistrates come *in person* to release them. *Now fearing greatly*, the magistrates went to the prison and brought Paul and Silas out and asked them to leave Philippi.

Acts 16:40 And they went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed.

Paul and Silas left the prison, but they did not leave the city right away. Instead they went to Lydia's and saw the brethren and comforted them. Then they departed. It was proper for Paul and Silas not to leave the city in haste, for to do so would have indicated they were afraid and, hence, would have given the wrong message to the other brethren.

Acts 17:1 Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews:

Acts 17:2 And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures,

As we have seen over and over, Paul's method was to go first to a synagogue. Even though the Jewish Church had been cast off from exclusive favor at this time, Paul had Jesus' words in mind that "salvation is [first] of the Jews" (John 4:22). Not only will that principle apply in the next age, and not only did it apply to the start of the gospel message at the First Advent, but Paul continued to apply the principle during his ministry (Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8).

The mention of Paul and Silas's itinerary gives us the feeling that we are journeying with them. Evidently, Amphipolis and Apollonia were anti-Semitic and hence had no synagogue, so Paul and Silas went on to Thessalonica. Of the three places, Thessalonica was larger, and being more cosmopolitan, it had a significant synagogue. Therefore, Paul made Thessalonica his next mission, and in the synagogue, he reasoned out of the Scriptures for three sabbath days. As usual, trouble would soon erupt, but he was there long enough to attract hearing ears among both Jews and Greek proselytes.

Acts 17:3 Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from

the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.

Verse 3 gives us a little insight into Paul's technique in witnessing. He "opened" and "alleged" regarding Jesus; that is, he showed from Old Testament prophecies that it was first necessary for Messiah to suffer and that later he would reign (exercise authority) as King. Paul laid the foundation for his discourse by going right to the heart of the issue, meeting boldly and strikingly what would be counter to the normal thought—for didn't the Jews expect that Messiah would be King and establish his Kingdom when he came? After explaining the *suffering* Messiah, he showed that Jesus was *that* Messiah. Paul probably used texts from Isaiah and the Psalms and pointed out the sacrifices under the Law, showing particularly where the animal being slain and burnt represented the humanity of Jesus. His main point was to excite their interest that the Messiah had come, but he laid the groundwork by showing the suffering aspect first. Paul's words were meaningful, for all of the Jews knew about Jesus' crucifixion.

Paul spoke *from conviction*—he *alleged*. He did not say, "It appears to me," "It seems reasonable to me," etc., but was *bold and confident*. Paul alleged that Christ *must arise* from the dead: "Thou wilt not ... suffer thine Holy One to see corruption" (Psa. 16:10).

Verse 3 is a summation of Paul's reasoning on the first of the three sabbaths, and then on the next two sabbaths, he would have gone into other details, which the account does not discuss. When Paul began by showing that Jesus was Christ, we assume he started with Jesus' miraculous birth from a virgin, pointed out Bethlehem as the prophesied birth place, and proved Jesus was in the patriarchal lineage of Abraham and David (Isa. 7:14; Micah 5:2). Paul was orderly in his reasoning, laying a foundation from the Old Testament. Then he probably told how Jesus was baptized at age 30, the proper age of manhood, and began his ministry. He would have gone on to show the nature of Jesus' teaching, the message of hope apart from the Law, and of course the miracles, which attested to the credibility of Jesus' being the Messiah.

Acts 17:4 And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few.

Some of the Jews in the synagogue believed, as did "a great multitude" of the devout Greeks and many chief women. Percentage-wise, fewer Jews accepted Christ compared to the Greeks and even the women. However, the number of Jews who believed left a large hole in the congregation, thus arousing the Jewish leaders to envy.

Acts 17:5 But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people.

The Jews in the synagogue who did not believe in Jesus were jealous of Paul because so many left their congregation. Imagine being respected as the chief ruler of the synagogue when these two strangers entered and, through Jewish Law and custom, availed themselves of the opportunity to speak! Excitement ensued both during and after the meeting. Fearful of what would happen if Paul and Silas stayed, the unbelieving Jews sought out a company of base men to cause an "uproar." Their actions were like getting the baser element of society and inciting them to do a lynching. The Jews were trying to arouse the civil authorities and hoped that the disturbance would result in the death of Paul and Silas. At the very least, these Jews felt that the uproar, in attracting the attention of the civil magistrates, would cool the enthusiasm for Paul's teaching.

Acts 17:6 And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also;

When the company of Jews and base fellows assaulted Jason's house but could not find Paul and Silas, they dragged Jason and certain other brethren to the rulers. Jason, a Jew, who was called a "kinsman," not as a relative but in a loose sense, was accused of receiving Paul and Silas and of turning "the world upside down" (Rom. 16:21). Elijah and Paul were similarly accused on other occasions (1 Kings 18:17; Acts 16:20). Since the opposing Jews could not find Paul and Silas, they did the next best thing from their standpoint in seizing the host of the house where the two had stayed.

Acts 17:7 Whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus.

Just as Jesus had been accused of dishonoring Caesar, so now those who were arrested were accused of not obeying the decrees of Caesar and of saying there was another king: Jesus. Once this accusation was made, the rulers of the city could not ignore the charge. Paul may have told in the synagogue of the sign Pilate put on the Cross, which read, "THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS" (Matt. 27:37). This accusation, written in three languages, showed the King aspect as well as the fulfillment of the Old Testament Scripture that the King of the Jews would come unto them, riding upon a colt, the foal of an ass (Zech. 9:9; Luke 23:38). Paul's presentation had been powerful, and his enemies could see that it would convict others if he was not stopped. Their reasoning was of the Adversary.

Acts 17:8 And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things.

Acts 17:9 And when they had taken security of Jason, and of the other, they let them go.

"Security" was bail, or a bond. After getting bail, the authorities let Jason and the other individual go. Obviously, the authorities found that the nature of the disciples' reasoning was no cause for fear of treason. Jason probably told them that Paul did indeed preach about a King but that the King would be spiritual, not in the present age, and in Israel, not in Thessalonica. Evidently, Jason was not an ordinary person but a man of means and one who could reason logically. The rulers could see that the opposing Jews and the "lewd fellows of the baser sort" did not have a creditable charge, but to make sure that Jason and the other individual did not run away, the rulers took security from both of them.

Acts 17:10 And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews.

The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, which was not far away from Thessalonica, being on the other side of the bay. Paul followed his usual custom and went to the synagogue.

Acts 17:11 These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

The noble Bereans "received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so." In other words, they listened intently to Paul's preaching about Jesus and then went to the Scriptures on a daily basis to prove whether what they heard was true. There is a difference between credulity and faith. The Bereans did not react out of credulity, which is a willingness to receive with an open and ready mind but not searching out the matter. By this method, one is open to all kinds of suggestions and just flounders around like a ship without a rudder. Openness of mind is a good quality, but it needs a stabilizing factor. Searching the Old Testament was the stabilizing factor, and the searching showed *faith*. Since the Bereans believed that the Old Testament was God's Word, they compared Paul's

reasoning with it, and in doing so, they were following a *process of faith* that was supported by *knowledge*. They did not just believe what another said or thought. It was proper to check even an *apostle's words* to see if they squared with Scripture. Possibly the Bereans were more educated and had philosophical minds, and thus were willing to listen to reason.

A comparison of Jesus and Moses is a very powerful and logical way to witness to the Jews. For example, Moses controlled the Red Sea, and it opened up. Jesus controlled the Sea of Galilee, and he walked on it. Moses was instrumental as an agent with the manna from heaven. Jesus not only was the antitypical Bread from heaven, but he miraculously fed the multitudes with bread on two occasions.

Acts 17:12 Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few.

In searching the Scriptures, therefore, many Bereans believed, and the believing women outnumbered the men. The Grecians were known for their knowledge, and in this part of the world, the women were knowledgeable.

Comment: The Church was becoming more of a Gentile Church as time went on.

Acts 17:13 But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people.

The Thessalonian Jews, who had been envious of Paul, now wanted to create havoc in Berea and get him out of the region entirely. They were not satisfied that he was prohibited from returning to Thessalonica. And now, being outside Thessalonica, these Jews may have felt more liberty and even have intended to assassinate Paul. While under strict Roman jurisdiction, they had to be a little more careful.

Acts 17:14 And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go as it were to the sea: but Silas and Timotheus abode there still.

Acts 17:15 And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens: and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with all speed, they departed.

Immediately the brethren pretended to send Paul away by the sea. (Similarly in Jericho, Rahab said falsely of the Israelite spies, "They went thataway"—Josh. 2:3-7.) Evidently, Paul went by land, for sea would have been an easy route to track. Based on the time period that was involved, it would be known which boat went where.

Verse 15 is proof that Paul went by land. Some of the brethren who were familiar with the land route "conducted" him; that is, they accompanied him and showed him the way. If Paul had gone by boat, he would not have to be accompanied, for the boat regularly traveled the route to Athens, a place of great prominence. Because of the mountainous terrain, the land route was exhausting and perilous.

Verse 14 mentions Timothy as being on the journey with Paul, Silas, and Luke. When Paul departed by land, Silas and Timothy were left behind to strengthen and confirm the brethren there in Berea. Paul's rigorous journey of a couple hundred miles over arduous terrain would have taken quite a while. After this time period, Paul sent a message (probably by boat) to Timothy and Silas to come quickly to Athens, for he knew his ministry there would not be very long.

Acts 17:16 Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he

saw the city wholly given to idolatry.

Acts 17:17 Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him.

Paul waited in Athens, perhaps a couple of months, for Silas and Timothy to come to him. Meanwhile, he went to the synagogue to reason and converse with the Jews. The city was “wholly given to idolatry.” It has been said that a tourist walking through the streets of the city would meet more gods than people. As Paul saw all the statuary and buildings dedicated to the numerous heathen gods, he probably felt sad for the Athenians because of their ignorance and deep involvement in polytheism. Therefore, he also went to the marketplace, which was like a gossip center (similar to Union Square in old New York City). New ideas could be presented there, so Paul preached Jesus and the resurrection.

Acts 17:18 Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoics, encountered him. And some said, What will this babbler say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection.

Acts 17:19 And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is?

Acts 17:20 For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean.

Acts 17:21 (For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.)

Two of the factions were the Stoics and the Epicureans. Along with Plato and Aristotle, which were two other factions, these were the four major teachings at that time. The Stoics, being fatalists and thinking that fate determined everything, were unmoved and had no feeling. They felt that if something was going to happen to a person, it was going to happen. Whereas the Stoics were more rational and serious, the Epicureans lived for pleasure and taught, in a nutshell, “Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.” Although neither faction believed in a resurrection, the Stoics did believe in a Creator but were more like infidels.

By the time Paul arrived in Athens, the development with all of the gods and goddesses had been going on for several centuries. “Athens” means Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom. The Roman counterpart was Minerva. In other words, the same goddess had different names in different countries. Athens was the cultural center of the world at that time, so the people were highly educated. Paul, being from Tarsus, had an intellectual background that fitted him for speaking to the Athenians.

The word translated “gods” in verse 18 means “demons” in the Greek. Paul was accused of setting forth strange demons (Greek *daimonian*) in the sense of a false religion, whereas the reverse was true. All of the gods and goddesses were Satanic worship under many different forms. Rome and Greece each had an established “orthodox” religion, and one could believe in many gods as long as there was a statue for that god. To introduce any new or strange gods in Athens brought a death penalty, so Paul followed a most ingenious strategy in preaching a sermon and using courageous reasoning to avoid death. While Athens had many gods, the people were not amenable to a new one. Established orthodoxy has the same attitude today toward present truth in considering it to be a dangerous cult.

“What will this babbler say?” was a derogatory question. “Babbler” in Greek originally meant a “seed picker”; that is, Paul’s doctrine about Jesus and the resurrection was so new and

strange to the hearers that it was regarded as dangerous. Therefore, the Athenians and others who were present led Paul to the civic square, the place of judgment, which was called the Areopagus, where he had to watch his words very carefully because the death penalty was a possibility. On a high hill were the Parthenon and other buildings. From there, one could look down and see a little hill called Mars' Hill and the Areopagus. Near the base of the little hill was the Agora, the marketplace.

“He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods.” In regard to the term “strange gods,” it was believed by nations and empires of the past, such as Egypt and Rome, that those who sat in the throne were conceived by the gods and thus were *gods* in human flesh. Thus rulers were thought to be the seed of the gods. The Athenians were familiar with this line of thinking. What they accused Paul of, however, was the reverse: that he was preaching a man who was made a god. The Greeks believed that the gods could come down and materialize but not that a *human* could be deified up to the spirit realm.

Acts 17:22 Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious.

In review, Paul had been out walking when he saw all the statues. The statuary moved him to speak in the marketplace, where he had some discussions and encounters with the Epicureans and the Stoics, who subsequently took him to Mars' Hill to be judged in regard to his doctrine. (“Areo” means “Mars.”) Incidentally, Mars' Hill is relatively small compared with the Acropolis, which sits above it.

In the marketplace, Paul had told about Jesus, which was a new doctrine to the Athenians. Thinking his doctrine could be dangerous, they took him to the “Supreme Court,” as it were. In Athens, where there were thousands of gods and statues dedicated to gods, it was considered that the pantheon of gods was complete, so if any new god was introduced, the penalty could be death. Knowing about this law when he gave his sermon on Jesus, Paul pursued a most ingenious strategy, using a very skillful technique, to preach the message of truth.

Paul began his sermon with the following words: “Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious.” The thought is that they were “too religious,” “overly religious,” or “very religious.” His statement caught the hearers off guard: “Seeing that there is such an abundance of statues, I perceive that you are too religious.” How ingenious! What a masterpiece! Paul may even have waved his hands toward the various statues as he spoke.

Acts 17:23 For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.

Paul proceeded in a tactful manner by saying in effect, “As I passed through the streets of Athens, I noticed your devotions. Your religiosity is very manifest.” Their “devotions” were the gods they worshipped (see King James margin). On one altar was an inscription indicating that devotees could give offerings to the “unknown god.” Paul’s conviction, lack of fear, and brilliant reasoning were outstanding. He continued, “Whom therefore ye *ignorantly* worship, him declare I unto you.” A Greek did not want to be thought of as ignorant, but here was the *proof*: the inscription “To the *unknown* god.” Paul was saying, “This unknown god is the one I will speak about.” Like a lawyer in a court case, Paul was pleading his cause factually. Now he would proceed to tell about the “unknown god.”

Acts 17:24 God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands;

The “God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands.” Who could find fault with that statement? Paul’s point was, “How could the great God and Creator, who *made the heavens and the earth*, be confined to a building *made by man*, and how could He be worshipped as a statue *made by man*?” The act of making statuary and housing it in temples was a very small concept of God. Incidentally, these images, which possessed a form, were not like the Ark of the Covenant in the Most Holy, which was a box. The images were made by human hands and then worshipped as a god. In a more recent example, Roman Catholicism teaches its communicants to speak to and worship before a dumb idol as if it hears them.

Acts 17:25 Neither is worshipped with men’s hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things;

The *great God* gives “[the spark of] life, and [the] breath [of life], and all things [needful]” to all living beings, so He *does not need* an idol *made by man*. Paul was pleading his cause not only to those who had brought him to Mars’ Hill but also to judges, who sat there hearing his words and cause so that they could render judgment. Paul showed immediately that his message was on a higher level than all of the statues. In fact, one of the judges, Dionysius the Areopagite, subsequently accepted the gospel message (Acts 17:34), and to do so *cost* him a *great* deal. Paul’s sermon changed Dionysius as an individual.

Paul was speaking very tactfully: “Not only can the God of heaven not be confined to earthly edifices, but your statues have no breath. Generally speaking, the statues have the form of a man or a woman, but they cannot walk, talk, or hear. The God who created the universe has created us as a *living* form, and we can move, breathe, and talk. We are a far more wonderful example of God’s power than the statues you have made. The statues are a by-product of *your* hands, but you are a by-product of *God’s* hands.” Paul’s high line of thinking and logic were a blockbuster.

Acts 17:26 And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation;

In giving such a broad and noble concept in his sermon, Paul was using a method that the Athenians could not gainsay thus far. The statement that God “hath made of one blood all nations of men” harkens back to Adam, showing that the human race had a common beginning. The word “blood” is supplied, so the thought is that God made of *one man*, Adam, all nations of men—that originally all mankind came from *one* source. From the standpoint of the natural mind, Paul was using common-sense reasoning. The Greeks thought very highly of themselves with their intellect, and Paul was subtly showing that despite their great wisdom, they were just like other men. Instead of speaking direct, Paul used innuendo.

Paul continued to build up the broad concept, saying that from Adam, God made all mankind “to dwell on all the face of the earth” and that God “hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their [man’s] habitation.” In referring to “bounds,” or *boundaries*, Paul was referring to nations other than Greece. In other words, God made *all* people of *all* nations on the face of the earth—wherever they dwell and of whatever nationality, culture, race, or characteristics they are. He was saying, “Not only did the one God create the heavens and the earth, but He created us in all of our diversity. He divided the nations into their various compartments, or national boundaries, but we *all* owe our being—our very breath—to *Him*.”

The Athenians were extremely well educated. Of course democracy started in Greece, and the nation had famous philosophers like Plato and Aristotle, but pride of intellect was a problem. Therefore, Paul was trying to get the Greeks out of the Grecian mode and into the *enlarged*

concept and perspective of *their littleness* and *God's greatness*. He wanted the Greeks to see the inadequacy of trying to worship God through imagery. Worship was to be *direct* and *from the heart*.

Acts 17:27 That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us:

This was another very high and noble concept: “Though he be not far from every one of us.” God is very far away and yet very near because of His capability. Imagery is not necessary, for God can hear the prayers of those on planet Earth, and He is near to those who are dear to Him wherever they are. Although this reasoning was natural, it was so superior that it was almost spiritual.

Acts 17:28 For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.

Paul wisely quoted a statement made by two of their own Greek poets: “For we are also his offspring.” Again the Greeks who were listening could not gainsay Paul.

Acts 17:29 Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device.

“Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God [as your own poets declare], we ought not to think that Deity [Greek *ho Theios*] is like unto [statues of] gold, or silver, or stone, graven [made] by art and *man's [own]* device.” Paul was saying to the Athenians, “My words are not a novelty,” and yet they really were because his thinking was so much higher than theirs.

Acts 17:30 And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent:

Acts 17:31 Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.

At the time Paul saw the glorified Jesus above the brightness of the noonday sun, he was given a commission to speak before kings and Gentiles as the Lord's emissary. He *felt* this authority and uttered strong statements, but in between, he wove in such noble thoughts that the Greeks could not get a handle on his sermon or gainsay him. See the *Expanded Biblical Comments* for verses 30 and 31.

God “winked at” (tolerated, permitted, overlooked) man's ignorance in times past because there was not as much responsibility. But *now* had come a *moment* of decision through Paul as commissioned ambassador for Christ to the Gentiles. Paul spoke unwaveringly, being fully convinced of his mission as an authentic representative of God and Jesus. Now God was commanding men everywhere to repent. And when one repents, the focus should be on Jesus, so Paul brought in Jesus as the “man” whom God hath “ordained” (appointed) to judge the world during the Millennial Day, when all will have to bow the knee and confess that “Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:10,11). Notice Paul's tact in saying that God commands “*all men*,” not just Greeks, when they come in contact with the gospel message to make a proper decision. All the while, Dionysius was listening to Paul, who spoke *unswervingly* and *with conviction*.

Comment: Verse 30 is a proof text that those who hear the gospel (and present truth) in this age, especially with understanding, and do not respond favorably will not get special rewards

in the Kingdom, generally speaking.

Acts 17:32 And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter.

When Paul mentioned the resurrection, saying that God had raised Jesus from the dead, he could not proceed with his sermon because some of the listeners began to mock and laugh him to scorn. Others said they would hear more about the matter later. Providentially, the court was distracted from rendering a decision, and the meeting broke up without a judgment. Meanwhile, enough had been said to convert Dionysius and the woman Damaris (Acts 17:34).

When, earlier, the Berean brethren had escorted Paul to Athens, he sent back a message for Timothy and Silas to come to him as soon as possible (Acts 17:15). The trip would take time, and Paul gave this sermon while he waited alone in Athens. His spirit was aroused when he saw all the statuary, so he began to speak with urgency (Acts 17:16,17). Paul's experience is an example of how the Holy Spirit can operate powerfully through a human agency under certain circumstances.

Comment: Just as this operation of the Holy Spirit came at the beginning of the Gospel Age, so a similar operation will occur with the feet members at the end of the age.

Reply: Yes, the feet members will give a strong message, not a wavering one. The message will not convert the audience anymore than Stephen's sermon did, but it will serve a definite purpose. When Stephen finished, he was stoned to death. Stephen and Paul were very much alike in their manner of delivering a sermon, but Paul was chosen by God as the superior one. Many times he was persecuted, but he went right out as if nothing had happened and started all over again with great zeal.

Acts 17:33 So Paul departed from among them.

Acts 17:34 Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

The Athenians were either hot or cold. Some joined Paul and believed; others opposed him. It was not wrong for the Athenians, as a people, to seek knowledge, but of those with this culture and background, only the right-hearted properly received the startling sermon by a stranger in their midst. They "clave" unto Paul and did not want to lose the opportunity to hear more. He did not stay as long in Athens as he did in Corinth and Ephesus.

Acts 18:1 After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth:

Acts 18:2 And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them.

Paul went to Corinth, and there he met Aquila and his wife Priscilla. Of the two, Priscilla was more unusual, but Aquila will certainly share in any future reward because of his cooperation in the ministry—probably through Priscilla's initiative in some cases.

For a brief time, the Roman Emperor Claudius providentially commanded that all Jews leave Rome. (This is an example of how the Lord can move an entire nation for one individual.) When Claudius died, Jews returned to Rome in large numbers. Meanwhile, it was providential for Paul to meet Aquila and Priscilla in Corinth.

Acts 18:3 And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers.

When Paul left Athens and went to Corinth, he evidently needed money, so he pursued his trade of tent making. While at work, he met Aquila and Priscilla, because Aquila was engaged in the same profession. Through that association, the three of them struck up an acquaintance, and the couple later supported Paul in his ministry on a long-term basis.

Q: Verse 11 says that on this trip to Corinth, Paul stayed for 1 1/2 years. Was one reason he remained so long the fact that Corinth was a sinful, pleasure-loving city? Hence the contrast between right and wrong made Corinth a more fruitful place to find Christians.

A: Paul stayed because the Lord told him, “I have much people in this city” (verse 10). Many in Corinth were called. Paul actually stayed even longer in the Corinth region, but he was in one location for 1 1/2 years.

Acts 18:4 And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks.

Again, as was customary, Paul went first to the synagogue. If the Jews had listened, he would have remained there, but when they began to persecute him or turned a deaf ear, he went to the Gentiles. However, he preached in the synagogue for a number of sabbaths and persuaded many, both Jews and Greek proselytes. Paul’s preaching about Jesus’ being the Jewish Messiah had to be eloquent and convincing for him to last so long in the synagogue.

Acts 18:5 And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ.

When Silas and Timothy arrived in Corinth from Macedonia, Paul “was pressed [confirmed] in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ.” In other words, when Silas and Timothy arrived, their presence gave Paul a great lift and encouragement, spurring him on to greater zeal in preaching about Jesus. In Athens, Paul was relatively alone, being without close fellowship. Now in Corinth, no doubt Priscilla and Aquila were also of much comfort to Paul, helping him in depressed moments. Incidentally, when Paul sent the message from Athens to Silas and Timothy to “come to him with all speed,” he may have said, “Come ... with all speed to Corinth” (Acts 17:15).

Comment: It is good for us to know that Paul experienced discouragement at times, for he was usually so strong. A *Manna* comment says that even the strongest of the brethren need encouragement and support from fellow brethren.

Reply: Being in a strange environment for a long time, Paul had moments of depression. The statement that after the arrival of Silas and Timothy, Paul “testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ” suggests that previously he used a slow, logical buildup, laying a foundation, to lead them to Christ. Now he spoke direct and boldly without a long introduction. Both methods have their place depending on circumstance.

Acts 18:6 And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles.

When the Jews resisted the message about Christ and blasphemed, Paul shook his raiment, following the principle of Jesus’ advice, and said, “Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles” (Matt. 10:14). The uproar prevented Paul

from continuing. Hence the door closed for his ministry in the synagogue. He had discharged his responsibility as a watchman and an apostle to his fellow kinsmen, and now he would go to the Gentiles in Corinth.

Acts 18:7 And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man's house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue.

Acts 18:8 And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.

Two very influential persons became Christians: Justus and Crispus, the *chief ruler* of the synagogue in which Paul had been preaching. As soon as Crispus made his decision, he lost his position in the synagogue. Becoming a Christian cost him MUCH—and he made this decision in a *short* time frame, not in two, three, or four years! Corinth was a large city, so the synagogue was sizable, making the position of “chief ruler” very influential, yet Crispus consecrated.

Comment: The conversion of Crispus is another example of one believing “with all his house.”

Reply: Yes, Crispus was unusual. Not only were Crispus and his house convicted, but so was Justus, the man whose house adjoined the synagogue. When Paul went to the Gentiles, the chief of the Jews went with him. These were remarkable and providential happenings. As a result, many Corinthians (Gentiles) believed.

Probably one reason Paul could speak a little longer than usual in the synagogue in Corinth was that the chief rabbi was enthralled with Paul's message and reasoning. Finally the congregation and other individuals aroused such opposition that Paul could not continue.

Acts 18:9 Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace:

Acts 18:10 For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city.

Acts 18:11 And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

In a night vision, Paul was informed that he would be providentially protected in Corinth, for God had “much people” there to be converted. The Lord was not telling Paul he would have no opposition but was saying that nothing life-threatening would happen. On this visit, Paul stayed in Corinth for 1 1/2 years.

Acts 18:12 And when Gallio was the deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment seat,

Acts 18:13 Saying, This fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law.

Acts 18:14 And when Paul was now about to open his mouth, Gallio said unto the Jews, If it were a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you:

Acts 18:15 But if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters.

Acts 18:16 And he drave them from the judgment seat.

Acts 18:17 Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. And Gallio cared for none of those things.

In the Corinth area, unbelieving Jews (those who had not accepted Christ) stirred up an insurrection against Paul and brought him to the judgment seat. Upon hearing the charge, Gallio, a Roman deputy, summarily dismissed it. The charge that Paul persuaded men to worship God contrary to the Law was rather odd, for the Jews believed in and worshipped God. But sometimes they used what was convenient to bring a charge to curtail Paul's ministry. They felt that the gospel of Christ undercut the Mosaic Law.

"O ye Jews" expressed Gallio's anti-Semitic feeling. Sosthenes, a Jew and chief ruler of the synagogue, was beaten before the judgment seat. Gallio ignored the beating, for he had told the Jews to look into the matter themselves. And Gallio was correct to tell the Jews that the matter of the Law was not in his jurisdiction. Paul was evidently extricated from the situation.

Why was Sosthenes beaten? Sosthenes was the replacement for Crispus, the former chief ruler who became a Christian and left the synagogue. Because Sosthenes was also sympathetic to Paul, the Jews now vented their wrath on him. In other words, since they were not successful in having Paul punished, they directed their anger at Sosthenes. This incident took place in Corinth, and Sosthenes subsequently became a Christian (1 Cor. 1:1). The words "the Greeks" in verse 17 are spurious and should be omitted.

Comment: Gallio said, "O ye Jews, ... if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters." Pilate gave a similar response in regard to Jesus.

Reply: Yes, Pilate tried this strategy, but it did not work because then the religious leaders brought up another charge, namely, that Jesus claimed to be a king. Then hypocritically, they said, "We have no king but Caesar." What a lie because they were chafing under the Roman yoke, but it was convenient for them to give such a reply.

Acts 18:18 And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila; having shorn his head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow.

Acts 18:19 And he came to Ephesus, and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews.

Acts 18:20 When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not;

Acts 18:21 But bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, if God will. And he sailed from Ephesus.

Paul tarried in the Corinth area for a while and then sailed to Syria. But in leaving Cenchrea by boat, he stopped in Ephesus and stayed for one sabbath so that he could reason in the synagogue. When the brethren in Ephesus wanted him to remain longer, he declined, saying his purpose was to arrive in Jerusalem in time to observe a certain feast. However, he promised to return to them, God willing, and he did at a later date. His second missionary journey ended when he got to Jerusalem. Very shortly after the feast, he began his third missionary journey.

Q: Was the "feast" the Feast of Pentecost based on Acts 20:16?

A: That seems to be the case. At that time, the Feast of Pentecost was regarded with special favor, whereas during our Lord's earthly ministry, the Feast of Passover was the primary feast from the standpoint of coming from a distance.

Paul (not Aquila) shaved his head, probably because he took a Nazarite vow. The vow involved shaving the head and letting the hair grow for the length of the vow. At the expiration of the vow, the head was again shaved, and all of the hair was presented as an offering. The one who took the vow, being in a particular mood of contrition, removed the old hair, which pictures the old man in the antitype. The new growth, which takes place during the stipulated length of the vow, represents the development of the new creature in the service of the Lord. The vow was one of the reasons he wanted to be back in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost.

Acts 18:22 And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up, and saluted the church, he went down to Antioch.

Acts 18:23 And after he had spent some time there, he departed, and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples.

From Corinth, Paul went to the following places in the sequence listed: Syria, Cenchrea, Ephesus, Caesarea, Jerusalem, Antioch, Galatia, and Phrygia. In other words, after the Feast of Pentecost in Jerusalem, Paul went north to Antioch, which was the starting point of his next, or third, missionary journey. He spent some time in Antioch and then departed and went over all the region of Galatia and Phrygia "in order [that is, following a route], strengthening all the disciples." His Epistle to the Galatians was written before this third missionary tour. Paul was troubled that Christianized Jews said it was necessary for Christians to obey the Law of Moses as well as the gospel of Christ. Therefore, he strengthened the brethren by resolving their doubts and answering their questions. He helped them to see that the Christian is not under the Law. The *principles* of the Law apply to the Christian. However, justification (the making of one right in God's sight) is obtained *not* through the Law by the *imperfect* deeds of the flesh but through *faith in Christ and in his blood*.

Acts 18:24 And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus.

Acts 18:25 This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John.

Acts 18:26 And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.

While Paul was in Galatia and then Phrygia in Asia Minor, a Greek Jew named Apollos, a convert to Christ, was preaching at Ephesus. Apollos was commended for the following reasons: He was (1) eloquent, (2) mighty in the Scriptures, (3) instructed in the way of the Lord Jesus, and (4) fervent (zealous) in spirit. He also (5) spoke boldly and (6) taught accurately in the synagogue. (The word "diligently" is not correct.) *But he knew only John's baptism.*

Priscilla and Aquila heard Apollos "speak boldly," giving a *very powerful* discourse in the synagogue. Afterwards they took him aside and reasoned with him on "the way of God more perfectly." This statement does not mean that Priscilla knew more than Apollos, for he was a scholar from Alexandria and he not only knew his Bible but probably knew it better than Priscilla. However, he needed instruction regarding the baptismal *ceremony* of Jesus Christ. He would have understood the philosophy of being baptized into Jesus' death, but he did not

know about the symbol. John's baptism was a baptism of *repentance* and was *for Jews only*. Incidentally, the sequence should be (1) Priscilla and (2) Aquila, for although both reasoned with Apollos, Priscilla was more knowledgeable.

Q: Wouldn't Apollos have been begotten of the Holy Spirit, for that was empowering him to preach Jesus so fervently?

A: Yes.

Acts 18:27 And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace:

Acts 18:28 For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, showing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ.

The stay of Apollos in Ephesus was only temporary. Meanwhile, Paul was up in Asia Minor and had not yet returned to Ephesus. Apollos went on to Achaia (Greece) and eventually to Corinth. He preached in the synagogue, mightily convincing the Jews.

Acts 19:1 And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples,

Paul passed through the upper coasts of Phrygia in Asia Minor and then wended his way south to Ephesus. Meanwhile, Apollos was at Corinth.

Acts 19:2 He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.

Acts 19:3 And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism.

Acts 19:4 Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.

Acts 19:5 When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Acts 19:6 And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied.

Acts 19:7 And all the men were about twelve.

Twelve Christian converts were at Ephesus. Paul probably noticed their behavior and participation in the meeting, and seeing a lack, he asked if they had received the Holy Spirit. In other words, he knew they were Christians but wondered why they did not have the gifts of the Holy Spirit. They replied that they knew only John's baptism. Paul then had them baptized in the name of Christ, and when he laid his hands on them, they received gifts of the Holy Spirit. This incident brings up questions regarding baptism.

The Pastor taught the following about baptism. Jews did not have to be baptized into Christ, but any Jew who was not living in harmony with the Law Covenant did need John's baptism of repentance. The Jew needed no further baptism into Christ because the nation of Israel was in covenant relationship with God through Moses. (The nation was baptized into Moses when

it went under the cloud and through the Red Sea at the time of the Exodus.) Hence the national baptism was sufficient unless one became derelict to the Law Covenant. In that case, John's baptism brought repentance and reinstatement. Proof, said the Pastor, that obedient Jews did not need John's baptism was the fact John the Baptist was not baptized, and of the apostles, only Paul was said to be baptized.

We would respond, however, that according to Acts 2:5,38,41, "*devout*" Jews were assembled on the Day of Pentecost, and *all of them* were enjoined to be baptized into Christ. The Pastor reasoned that it was not necessary for devout Jews to be baptized into Christ because they were already in Moses, and Jesus is the antitypical Moses. But we ask, If a Jew in our midst today wanted to become a Christian, would the brethren try to prevent his baptism? No.

Comment: Some brethren have insisted that Acts 2:38 refers to John's baptism because the verse reads, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ *for the remission of sins.*" But the words "*in the name of Jesus Christ*" are included, and Jesus' baptism supersedes John's baptism.

Reply: That is correct. All Christians, Jew and Gentile, should be baptized into Christ.

In 1913 the Pastor was asked, "Seeing that our Lord Jesus symbolized his consecration by immersion in water, how was it that the Apostles did not do so?" His answer was, "I do not know." (See *What Pastor Russell Said*, page 36.) Two words should be added to that question: "Seeing that our Lord Jesus, *a Jew*, symbolized his consecration by immersion in water, how was it that the Apostles did not do so?" Jesus, the apostles, and all Jews were in the same situation, and of course Jesus is our best example. And another point: The Scriptures do not say the other apostles were not immersed.

Some are so wed to the Pastor's statements that they consider a variant opinion, *even though backed up by Scripture*, to be improper. In another place, the Pastor wrote, "If he, as a Jew, was already in Moses, then as a Jew, when he had recognized Christ as the antitypical Moses, he was already in the antitypical Moses by faith. Therefore, he did not need the same kind of baptism into Christ that a Gentile would need." In still another place, he wrote, "So all the Jews stood in a peculiar condition, different from any others. The Gentiles, however, were totally out of relationship with God. It was necessary that they should be brought into relationship with Him, and as long as they were not to go into Moses, and then be transferred from Moses into Christ, they were brought directly by baptism and faith and obedience into Christ." In other words, the Pastor felt that Jews, who were in the channel of Moses, did not need Jesus' baptism but that Gentiles did.

Q: Some who follow this reasoning of the Pastor qualify the reasoning and say that baptism into Christ was not needed by the Jews up until the time of the conversion of Cornelius. Is that thought an accommodation by the brethren?

A: Yes. That was not the Pastor's thought.

Comment: Paul said that God spared not the original branches and that the Gentiles were grafted into the olive tree. However, the original Jewish branches can be grafted back in, and any who are grafted in have to go through the same process of baptism into Christ.

Reply: That line of reasoning could be used based on the eleventh chapter of Romans.

We know that the twelve individuals in verse 7 were Jews, not Gentiles, because Apollos had preached *in the synagogue* (Acts 18:26). All twelve had received John's baptism through Apollos, but they needed *Christ's* baptism. After receiving John's baptism, the twelve were identified as

Christians and met with the brethren, but they lacked gifts of the Holy Spirit. Jesus' baptism, which had a much fuller meaning than John's baptism, resulted in his being filled with the Spirit and his being driven into the wilderness for prayer, fasting, and study. His mind was opened up in a new and marvelous way; that is, at the moment of baptism, the memory of his preexistence as the Logos and of his former personal association with the Father flooded his mind.

In a baptismal service, the candidate is asked the following questions: "Do you recognize you are a sinner?" "Do you repent from your sins?" "Have you accepted Jesus as your personal Savior?" Thus *repentance* and recognition of the *need for forgiveness of sins* are included in the baptismal service. Water represents the earth—just as when Jonah was cast into the sea and swallowed by a whale. Jesus used Jonah's being in the belly of the whale and his subsequent being spewed out upon dry land as a sign of his own death and resurrection (Matt. 12:40). For the baptismal candidate, water is a symbol of the grave, or death, and the individual's being raised up pictures resurrection. Stated another way, water baptism is a symbol of a person's being fully immersed in death and then being raised as a new creature in Christ. It is a symbol of complete obedience in doing God's will.

Paul spoke of being dead to sin. Baptism includes not only being buried into Christ but also repentance, being dead to sin, and the crucifixion of the flesh. For the symbol to be proper, water baptism shows that the candidate accepts Christ, recognizes the need for repentance and forgiveness, and wants to be buried with him. True, John's baptism was just for forgiveness, but Jesus' baptism is also for forgiveness—plus immersion into Christ.

The humility of Apollos was impressive. Although eloquent and very learned, he was willing to be taught, and he was instructed primarily by a *sister*. Paul praised Apollos and gave him equal status. Paul respected the ministry, efforts, and zeal of Apollos and did not deprecate him in any way (1 Cor. 1:12; 3:4-9,22,23).

Fear is a problem, but remember that Paul did not shun to declare the *whole* gospel of Christ (Acts 20:27). Teachers who have secret doubts often keep quiet. We are Bible Students, but we do not have all of the truth. We are *in the way* toward full truth. Yes, we have been blessed with more truth than others, but we need to keep learning and to keep receiving instruction from the Lord. Some of the simplest subjects are the most profound.

Comment: From the time that Jesus was baptized, all Christians (Gentile or Jew) have needed Jesus' baptism because *he* is the way.

Reply: Yes. Of course Jesus had no sin, but he was fulfilling the spiritual aspect. As the forerunner, he initiated the way, so what he did, we have to do. We are in need of grace and forgiveness, whereas Jesus was not.

Comment: Acts 22:16 connects repentance with Jesus' baptism: "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord [Jesus]."

Reply: Yes, baptism combines both features. All need justification, which is preceded by repentance and restitution as far as possible.

Q: Then is it reasonable to suppose that all of the apostles were baptized?

A: Yes.

Q: What about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost? When the Spirit was outwardly manifested, had the apostles already received Jesus' baptism?

A: Having the Holy Spirit and having the gifts of the Holy Spirit can be two different things. The gifts were outward signs of the inward situation. Some very devout Christians have never been baptized in water because they do not understand the doctrine and symbol and because they have been turned off by the sprinkling of infants. We must be faithful to that which we understand according to our circumstances. For a *full* blessing, however, it is important to be baptized in the name of Christ.

Q: Once Priscilla and Aquila explained to Apollos about the necessity for Jesus' baptism, why didn't Apollos go back to those he had already preached to, especially the twelve in Ephesus? When Paul came along, he had to tell the twelve.

A: Apollos may have left for Corinth right after Priscilla and Aquila reasoned with him, and he may not have realized that the twelve consecrated. Whatever the reason, Paul providentially arrived to straighten out the matter.

And there is another factor: It is not always possible to go back. People hear a sermon and consecrate, and then we may never see them again. When Peter dissembled, Paul had to rebuke him *immediately*—and in the presence of all. Jewish Christians came in who thought Christians should keep the Law and hence not eat with Gentiles. Peter was eating with a mixed group, but he got up when the Jewish Christians entered. Therefore, Peter had to be rebuked right away so that others would not be influenced by his action. Under other circumstances, Paul went to the apostles privately to reason with them lest he embarrass them. But if Paul had not acted immediately when Peter dissembled, some in the room could have gone away, and the matter would never have been corrected.

Apollos was humble and meek despite his boldness, and so was Peter. The Pastor once gave a sermon on meekness and used Peter as an example of true meekness.

Acts 19:8 And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God.

Acts 19:9 But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus.

Acts 19:10 And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.

As was customary, Paul went to the synagogue as he had done the year before. Ephesus was a city that many traveled to and through. For example, pilgrimages were made to the Temple of Diana at Ephesus, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Hence "all they which dwelt in Asia" heard about Jesus.

Paul spoke in the synagogue for three months. Some accepted the truth. For others, the truth was too strong, and they became hardened to it. When the latter began to cause trouble, Paul and the believers met in the school of Tyrannus. Paul stayed in Ephesus for two years, establishing a class and nurturing the brethren.

Acts 19:11 And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul:

Acts 19:12 So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them.

“Special miracles” were necessary in the beginning to get the gospel Church started and to help give publicity to Christianity. Had Jesus and the apostles not done miracles, the Christian Church would have been swallowed up. The Church needed a powerful start, and then it would grow on its own. An “apron” was a personal item of clothing. These miracles show that the mechanism itself is neither good nor evil. What is important is how the mechanism is used and what it teaches, that is, whether it is used by the fallen angels or by Jesus and the apostles. A modern-day example is television. Television itself is not evil, but what is shown on television can make it harmful. In these special miracles, Paul’s handkerchiefs or aprons—*inanimate* objects—not only healed illnesses but also cast out demons through the power of the Holy Spirit. Even Peter’s shadow brought healing (Acts 5:15). These cures were permissible in the early Church, but unfortunately, some Christians today turn to occult powers for cures, and they are adversely affected. The Vow warns us to avoid “everything akin to Spiritism and Occultism.”

Paul was still in Ephesus. This was his second trip there. His first trip was made in haste, for he stayed only one sabbath and then left for the Feast of Pentecost in Jerusalem. However, he promised to return, and he did so by way of Galatia and churches he had established earlier in Asia Minor (Acts 18:19-21). One reason why Paul was the “angel,” or messenger, to the Ephesus period of the Church is that he founded that church (Rev. 2:1). In a special way, Jesus’ hand, or power, was over Paul during the Ephesus period, just as Jesus’ power was over the other six messengers in the six subsequent stages of the gospel Church. Power was seen in Paul’s mighty and special miracles, especially at Ephesus, so that almost all in Asia knew of him (Acts 19:10). Jesus, through the Apostle John, threatened to remove the candlestick (the privilege of being light bearers) from those in the Ephesian Church if they did not “repent, and do the first works” (Rev. 2:5). It is peculiar that down through the Gospel Age, Ephesus had no inhabitants on a year-round basis for centuries—not until recent years—yet that location contains more ruins than any of the other seven churches of Revelation. The Ephesus period of the Church was *short*, being only about 35 years long.

Acts 19:13 Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth.

Acts 19:14 And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so.

Acts 19:15 And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?

Acts 19:16 And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

Seven sons of a Jew named Sceva were exorcists. Before they knew about Paul and Jesus, they were casting out demons in God’s name. Now, after observing Paul, they felt that the use of Jesus’ name would increase their power, but their attempt boomeranged. Instead of casting out the demon, the demon worked through the possessed individual and “leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.”

Q: On one occasion during his ministry, Jesus said to his accusers, “And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your sons cast them out?” (Luke 11:19). Wouldn’t the ability of Sceva’s seven sons be the same principle?

A: Yes, certain Jews who were exorcists were able, with some success, to cast out demons in

Jehovah's name.

The seven sons said to the evil spirit, "We [as a team of seven] adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth." They thought collective action would enhance their power. The evil spirit replied that he knew Jesus and Paul but not the seven. This response shows that demons had some knowledge of what Jesus, Paul, and the other apostles were doing in their ministries. This incident also helps us to realize that the demons have some knowledge of what goes on in truth circles today. However, although they can monitor and eavesdrop, they are probably kept from hearing certain things. *One* demon caused the possessed individual to use superhuman strength to violently beat up the *seven* sons of Sceva and tear off their clothing. Incidentally, angels have the ability to either enlarge themselves or shrink to the size of a soul so that thousands can fit in one human being, as was the case with Legion (Mark 5:9). Even when they were that small, they possessed minds, characteristics, sight, and hearing and thus used the individual through some kind of collective agreement. In other words, there was some degree of respect among the thieves. The Bible gives us clues as to how the demons operate.

For the seven sons to invoke Jesus' name but to say "whom *Paul* preacheth" shows the great influence the apostle had. God wrought unusual "*special* miracles" by the hand of Paul, such as raising the dead, casting out demons, repairing bones, and healing leprosy (Acts 19:11).

Q: In what way are the fallen angels prohibited from hearing certain information?

A: There is a saying, "Birds of a feather flock together." Accordingly, the fallen angels do not want to fellowship with the consecrated, who are endeavoring to live completely different lives, but because of their position and superior capabilities, the fallen angels are more cognizant of what is happening than ordinary people. Today we have communication satellites with electronic beams that broadcast live action around the world, and the fallen angels possess that sort of capability. However, in answer to the question, we would say that at Bible study meetings where the brethren are gathered, not only is a guardian angel present for each of the consecrated, but also the fallen angels are cordoned off. The study and fellowship are so important that the brethren are compassed about with the protection of holy angels.

Acts 19:17 And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified.

Acts 19:18 And many that believed came, and confessed, and showed their deeds.

In the beginning, Paul's ministry was primarily to Jews, that is, until he was expelled from the synagogue. Then he went to the school of Tyrannus, where some Greeks were influenced by his ministry, which grew mightily as time went on. Fear fell on "all the Jews and Greeks," and "the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified." Paul was determined to know nothing but "Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2). He spoke *repetitively* about Jesus, and this *major* theme of *glorifying* Jesus over and over in words and through miracles impressed the hearers. As a result, many consecrated.

Acts 19:19 Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.

To show their sincerity, those who practiced "curious arts" brought their valuable magic books and burned them. These handmade books, or scrolls, which were time-consuming and hard to make, dealt with mysticism and occultism and told such things as how to put hexes on people. The price of the magic books was known because there were so few of them, relatively

speaking.

When the people saw that the demon was more powerful than the seven exorcists, they had more respect for Paul and especially for Jesus. Not far away in Pergamos in Asia Minor, a secret room was used for occult healing. A hallucinatory drug was burned to produce smoke, and music was piped in through holes.

Acts 19:20 So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.

A great many people were influenced by Paul's ministry, but the interest was not of an abiding nature because of certain problems that existed. The Apostle John's presence helped to curb the damaging influence, but when he died, Ephesus fell into ruins.

Acts 19:21 After these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome.

Acts 19:22 So he sent into Macedonia two of them that ministered unto him, Timotheus and Erastus; but he himself stayed in Asia for a season.

After passing through Achaia (Greece) and Macedonia, Paul "purposed in the spirit" to go to Jerusalem and eventually to Rome, but for now he remained in Asia (Ephesus) for a while. With Achaia being such a large area, Paul may also have returned again to Corinth, for many Bible expositors know that he went to Corinth three times. While Paul stayed at Ephesus to strengthen that particular church, he sent Timothy and Erastus to Macedonia. Not only was this Paul's third missionary journey, but also this was the last time he actually stayed at Ephesus. (Subsequently, he would go to Miletus, which was on the coast about 40 miles south of Ephesus, and then on to Jerusalem—Acts 20:17,18.)

It is interesting that Paul mentioned Rome at this time, that is, before he went to Jerusalem to worship in the Temple and was brought to the Roman authorities (Festus, Felix, etc.). Therefore, he might have been informed that he would be sent to Rome.

We can see that Paul and Timothy had a close relationship and that Paul trusted Timothy, but we do not know much about Erastus, who is also mentioned in 2 Timothy 4:20 and Romans 16:23. Paul's second letter to Timothy was his last epistle (he worked on Hebrews, a masterpiece, for quite a while). It is nice to hear of the abiding faithfulness of some who were close to Paul.

Acts 19:23 And the same time there arose no small stir about that way.

Acts 19:24 For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen;

Acts 19:25 Whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth.

Acts 19:26 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:

Demetrius, a silversmith, got angry when the incomes of those in his craft were adversely affected as a result of Paul's preaching. The reaction at the end of the age when the smiting message is given will be similar. Diana worship, which was comparable to worship of the

Virgin Mary, was centered in Ephesus. World trade and tourism were a factor, for people came from all over the world to see the Temple of Diana and to do homage. Incidentally, the temple was a huge monument back there, but only one column remains in Ephesus today. Demetrius wanted the other craftsmen to join him in opposing Paul. He was angry with Paul for “saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands.” Notice that the influence of Paul’s ministry had spread “almost throughout all Asia.”

Initially the “temple” of Diana in Ephesus was just a wood hut. Diana was worshipped in other places as well. Similarly in our day, apparitions of the Virgin Mary have supposedly been seen in various little towns. Statues of Diana and models of the Temple of Diana were sold for good prices. Of course people who visited Ephesus took artifacts back to their different homelands, so Ephesus was world-renowned for Diana worship.

Paul spent considerable time in Ephesus. He was there, he left momentarily, he returned, and now some problems arose. Up until this point, his ministry in Ephesus was not curbed or shut down because the Lord’s power working through him brought great fear upon the people (Acts 19:17). With Paul’s message being on higher morals and on sublime thinking about God the Creator and His Son, Christ Jesus, whom He sent, the fear turned into reverence in the hearts of those who were properly exercised.

Acts 19:27 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.

Acts 19:28 And when they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians.

Demetrius was an influential speaker *for evil*. He said that the trade of the silversmiths was in jeopardy if they continued to let Paul preach. As a result of the speech of Demetrius, a chant broke out *over and over in great wrath*: “Great is Diana of the Ephesians!”

Artemis is the Grecian form of the name Diana. An “is” ending is often characteristic of a Greek name.

Acts 19:29 And the whole city was filled with confusion: and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul’s companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theatre.

Acts 19:30 And when Paul would have entered in unto the people, the disciples suffered him not.

Acts 19:31 And certain of the chief of Asia, which were his friends, sent unto him, desiring him that he would not adventure himself into the theatre.

Acts 19:32 Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the assembly was confused; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together.

A lot of shouting occurred, filling the “whole city” with “confusion.” The people rushed into the theater, but most of them did not know why they were gathered together. Paul would have entered the theater, but the disciples dissuaded him. Moreover, “certain of the chief [ones] of Asia, which were his friends,” urged him not to go into the theater.

Acts 19:33 And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made his defence unto the people.

Acts 19:34 But when they knew that he was a Jew, all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians.

This Alexander was Alexander the coppersmith, who eventually did Paul “much evil” (2 Tim. 4:14). A Christian Jew, he was originally favorable to the truth, but later he deflected, making shipwreck of his faith. Paul pointed out this troublemaker by name and disfellowshipped him, turning him over to Satan in the hope that he would “learn not to blaspheme” (1 Tim. 1:19,20). At the time, Alexander had already undermined the faith of some and would have done more injury if allowed to continue. This is a good example of how love has to take a firm stand in the case of grievous unrepented-of sin. The Scriptures tell us to *love* righteousness and *hate* iniquity.

At this point in Ephesus, however, Alexander was still faithful, and he was put forward to defend Paul. But when the people realized he was a Jew, they shouted *for two hours*, “Great is Diana of the Ephesians!”

Acts 19:35 And when the townclerk had appeased the people, he said, Ye men of Ephesus, what man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter?

Acts 19:36 Seeing then that these things cannot be spoken against, ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly.

Acts 19:37 For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess.

Acts 19:38 Wherefore if Demetrius, and the craftsmen which are with him, have a matter against any man, the law is open, and there are deputies: let them implead one another.

Acts 19:39 But if ye inquire any thing concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a lawful assembly.

Acts 19:40 For we are in danger to be called in question for this day’s uproar, there being no cause whereby we may give an account of this concourse.

Acts 19:41 And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the assembly.

The town clerk providentially used wisdom to stop the tumult. His intervention was similar to that of Gallio in Acts 18:14,15.

The town clerk reasoned that Ephesus would be called in question by Rome if the uproar continued. The Romans were firm for law and order, and for this reason, they stationed representatives of different levels of authority in various places throughout the Roman Empire to maintain order and make sure that no insurrections arose. If rioting did occur, the authorities would lose their position, and it could even mean their head, so they had to be firm and nip problems in the bud.

Acts 20:1 And after the uproar was ceased, Paul called unto him the disciples, and embraced them, and departed for to go into Macedonia.

After the uproar in Ephesus, Paul left for Macedonia.

Acts 20:2 And when he had gone over those parts, and had given them much exhortation, he came into Greece,

When Paul had gone through Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea, he went to Greece (to Athens and Corinth).

Acts 20:3 And there abode three months. And when the Jews laid wait for him, as he was about to sail into Syria, he purposed to return through Macedonia.

Paul stayed in Greece for three months. Then he changed his plans to leave by boat because the Jews were plotting against him if he sailed.

Acts 20:4 And there accompanied him into Asia Sopater of Berea; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timotheus; and of Asia, Tychicus and Trophimus.

Acts 20:5 These going before tarried for us at Troas.

Acts 20:6 And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days; where we abode seven days.

Derbe was in Asia Minor. The brethren met at Troas. The pronoun “we” in verse 6 means Luke had now rejoined Paul. The “days of unleavened bread” were the Passover and the Feast of Passover.

Acts 20:7 And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.

Regarding the first, seventh, etc., days of the week, “Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind” (Rom. 14:5). If we were in a fellowship where some made a certain day or days mandatory, we might have to seek fellowship elsewhere. The early custom was to favor Sunday for worship because Jesus appeared on Sundays after his resurrection. Coming together to “break bread” refers to fellowship, Scripture discussion, and eating a meal. On this occasion, Paul discoursed after dinner until midnight.

Acts 20:8 And there were many lights in the upper chamber, where they were gathered together.

There were “many lights” so that the room was well lit to read Scripture and also because it was a joyous occasion. Olive oil would have been used for the lights.

Acts 20:9 And there sat in a window a certain young man named Eutychus, being fallen into a deep sleep: and as Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead.

Acts 20:10 And Paul went down, and fell on him, and embracing him said, Trouble not yourselves; for his life is in him.

Eutychus, in a deep sleep, fell to his death from the third loft. In falling three stories, he probably landed outside on the ground. Paul lay on Eutychus and resuscitated him. The miracle was similar to that performed by Elijah, of which the statement was made, “The soul of the child came into him again, and he revived” (1 Kings 17:17-24). This Scripture proves that the soul is a separate entity.

Acts 20:11 When he therefore was come up again, and had broken bread, and eaten, and

talked a long while, even till break of day, so he departed.

Paul had a midnight snack and then resumed talking—until dawn.

Acts 20:12 And they brought the young man alive, and were not a little comforted.

The statement that the young man Eutychus was now “*alive*” proves he was indeed dead. The brethren were greatly comforted by his resuscitation and listened even more intently to Paul.

Acts 20:13 And we went before to ship, and sailed unto Assos, there intending to take in Paul: for so had he appointed, minding himself to go afoot.

Paul’s companions had gone on to the next seaport while Paul stayed behind. He now walked to Assos, without sleep, to meet the brethren. Paul had been up around the clock. Indeed he laid down his life for the brethren.

Acts 20:14 And when he met with us at Assos, we took him in, and came to Mitylene.

Acts 20:15 And we sailed thence, and came the next day over against Chios; and the next day we arrived at Samos, and tarried at Trogyllium; and the next day we came to Miletus.

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

Pentecost was 50 days after Passover. The brethren took exhausted Paul into the boat. He stayed at Miletus on the coast, for he did not want to go into mainland Asia.

Acts 20:17 And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church.

From Miletus, Paul called for certain elders from Ephesus and others long in the truth to meet him.

Acts 20:18 And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons,

Acts 20:19 Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews:

Acts 20:20 And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shown you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house,

Paul had spent about three years in Ephesus, and this, he felt, would be his last time to see the brethren. He reviewed the type of Christian he had been under all circumstances. Not only had he served with humility, gone door to door, and been willing to speak to small groups, but also he had shed tears as a parent for a child, laboring so that Christ would be formed in them (Gal. 4:19). He frequently prayed for the brethren and was tender and concerned for their welfare. Again he mentioned that the Jews had lain in wait for him. He wanted the brethren to realize why he was so concerned for them. He had declared the *whole* counsel of God; that is, he did not shrink from declaring anything profitable, *even if the words hurt*. He gave a *complete* message, *even if doing so brought persecution*.

Acts 20:21 Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul testified repentance toward God and faith justification through Jesus. Forgiveness is to be preceded by repentance and confession of faults to God and perhaps to others.

Acts 20:22 And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there:

Acts 20:23 Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me.

Acts 20:24 But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.

The Holy Spirit spoke through other brethren that trials awaited Paul in Jerusalem. Nevertheless, he was determined to go on to that destination because he wanted to finish his course and his ministry *with joy*.

Acts 20:25 And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more.

Paul did not expect to see them again.

Acts 20:26 Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men.

Paul was “pure from the blood of all men.” This statement was based on Ezekiel 33:1-20, which pertains to the responsibility of a watchman over natural or spiritual Israel. Paul’s words were especially appropriate because he was addressing elders, who had others under their responsibility. The principle is that one must warn or he incurs guilt like the wicked one. There is a sharing of destiny by keeping silent and saying that love covers “a multitude of sins” (James 5:20).

Acts 20:27 For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.

We are to preach “*all* the counsel of God.” Admonition is not pleasant to give, but it is a necessary part of the counsel. Properly warning keeps us pure from the bloodguilt of responsibility toward others. An elder should preach on various subjects and not push just one type of service. We are to study the *whole* Word.

Acts 20:28 Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

Paul’s charge to the elders was, “Take heed ... unto yourselves [as elders], and to all the flock, ... to feed the church of God [both the lambs and the sheep].” In other words, Paul charged the elders to declare the *whole* counsel of God.

Acts 20:29 For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.

Paul warned that “grievous wolves” would enter after his departure as well as after his death. Wolves would *come in from the outside* to attack or select as a target the elderly, who may not be able to reason as well; the weak; and the young or the immature, who are not stable in doctrine. Not really a consecrated element, wolves have ulterior motives of coming in to get followers (2 Cor. 11:13-15). There are three categories of wolves, all of which are destructive by

nature. Their intent is to capture and consume the brethren in the sense of appropriating them to themselves. The three categories are as follows:

1. Wolves in sheep's clothing *pretend* to be Christians (Matt. 7:15). They have a wolfish disposition but use prudence and tact.
2. Grievous wolves *do not pretend*.
3. Others profess consecration but later depart from the way and, in their unrepentant condition, adversely influence brethren, teaching doctrinal error, for example.

Some wolves are in sheep's clothing, speaking pleasantly, and some are not—but *none of these wolves are Christians*. Such individuals may have professed consecration, but they did not mean it.

Acts 20:30 Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.

Some *within the movement*—that is, they arise *from within*—speak “perverse things.” Although initially they may have been bona fide Christians, they depart from the faith, and by remaining among the brethren, they now adversely affect others. Jude 10-12 describes a Second Death class who think and act according to *natural* human wisdom and reasoning and not according to *Scriptural* instruction and principles. Their primary motive is “to draw away disciples after them[selves].” The grievous wolves who come in from the outside may also want to make a showing or to enrich or advantage themselves in some way.

An example of *natural* human reasoning is a gospel of psychology or a gospel of health, and the sum and substance of the message is very little, if anything, of Scriptural admonition. The influence of such individuals injures brethren either by keeping them from making their calling and election sure or, worse, by making a total shipwreck of their faith.

Comment: These verses show the necessity for judging *outward* actions because we are discussing different situations. Some come in from the outside never having made a vow of consecration, and some from within probably did profess consecration at one time but turned away from their vow. We cannot judge the sincerity of one's consecration, but we can (and should) observe outward actions to see if they square with an individual's profession. There are times when we must take a stand accordingly.

Reply: The Lord said, “Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves” (Matt. 10:16). Literal sheep are not wise by nature, but heeding Scriptural instruction makes the Lord's sheep wise. Some people, because of a long association with brethren, are recognized as brothers or sisters even though they never made a consecration. If no distinction is made between the consecrated and the unconsecrated, a newcomer may enter an established ecclesia and not know the difference. Therefore, the Apostle Paul was telling the brethren to keep their eyes open. Both Jesus and Paul were saying that the consecrated were like sheep going in the midst of wolves and that the sheep should watch every step of the way. The same principle was expressed in Romans 16:17, where Paul said to “mark” those who “cause divisions and offences *contrary to the doctrine*.” (“Offences,” from the Greek *skandalon*, are stumbling blocks.) Some divisions properly take place because of doctrine and are approved of the Lord, and some do not. To be able to tell the difference, we need to study the *Bible* as well as the *Volumes*.

Acts 20:31 Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.

The admonition “*Therefore watch*” should be appended to verses 28-30. The thought is the

following: “Grievous wolves shall enter in, and of your own selves, some shall arise; therefore, watch.” Verse 31 should start with “Remember” because it expresses a separate thought. We can see Paul’s sense of urgency in trying to establish the churches wherever he was. Knowing that he would not be staying in one place permanently, he felt a responsibility to get the brethren nursed to a certain level of development so that he could leave them in the custody of mature brethren. Paul said, “By the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.” In between, he earned his living making tents.

Comment: All of the consecrated are responsible for watching and guarding themselves, not just the elders, for some elders do not warn.

Reply: Yes, and sisters can be more developed than some elders.

Paul agonized—with tears—over the development of the brethren, wanting Christ to be formed in them (Gal. 4:19). His caution to the brethren back there still applies today. Thus we are to observe (1) those who come in among us from the outside and (2) those from within our midst who arise to positions of prominence and influence in the movement. For this very reason, he also admonished us not to “lay hands suddenly” on any man, for a teacher has responsibility (1 Tim. 5:22). We should know something about a brother, especially one in a teaching capacity, lest we wish God’s blessing on him too hastily. We are responsible for our endorsements.

Acts 20:32 And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.

God’s Word is “able to build ... up, and to give ... an inheritance” in the Little Flock. Jesus said his disciples would feel a sense of loss upon his departure. However, he would not leave them as orphans but would teach them through the Holy Spirit. We are sanctified by the Word of truth (John 17:17). Jesus also comforted his disciples by saying he would be with them “always, even unto the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20). Thus he assured them of his interest and concern. As a spirit being, he would be observing his human disciples, and as High Priest, he would be supervising them.

Likewise Paul assured the Ephesian brethren by commending them to God’s grace and Word, saying in effect, “I have been a minister of God, I have spoken with Jesus, and I have had more visions than any other man—but now I have to leave, so you must throw your whole weight on the grace of God.” Leadership would arise, but Paul was cautioning the brethren to be wary of that leadership and to trust in the grace of God. In other words, they were to *pray* for God’s leaders, *pray* for His grace and help, and *pray* for His instruction, leaning on His Word.

The “sanctified” are those who have made a consecration. Therefore, they are justified and are walking in the narrow way of consecration and sanctification. In other words, sanctification is an *ongoing process* that begins with the initial profession of consecration and is meant to continue to the end of one’s course. Sanctification is the process of consecration in which one is being set apart in his heart for future use to God. If the Lord is pleased with what He sees and the individual is faithful unto death, then that one is qualified to be a minister in the next age and to receive an “inheritance” among those who have already proven faithful. Because sanctification is a process, there is always the danger of falling away. One can be faithful 20 years, 30 years, 40 years, or longer and still lose out at the end. The Lord watches the development of the consecrated. To gain an inheritance among the sanctified, one must please the Lord and seal a testimony in faithfulness unto death.

Acts 20:33 I have coveted no man’s silver, or gold, or apparel.

Acts 20:34 Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me.

Paul realized that some of the future leaders would expect to be supported and would have a covetous bent of mind. He set the proper example by working for his own necessities and for the necessities of the four or five brethren who were with him. Some were so anxious to help with Paul's ministry that they accompanied him to a certain stop and then returned home. Others went with him for a period of time. A few were lifelong companions, and from time to time, Paul would instruct them to stay at a particular place and join him later.

No doubt Paul was very skillful in tent making, and he exercised this skill when needed so that he would not be a burden to those whom he served. Although he did receive temporal things from others on occasion, he did not covet them but was willing to give all for the spiritual development of the brethren and, if need be, his life.

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

Paul used wisdom in showing others how to labor. It is more blessed to give than to receive, but both are a blessing. Moreover, those who accompanied him also worked, as indicated by Paul's statement here.

Along another line, it is more blessed to be a teacher, but being a teacher is more dangerous. As we look down through history—and perhaps it is true also of the current generation—being a teacher has probably damaged more individuals, proportionately speaking, than it has helped.

Acts 20:36 And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all.

Acts 20:37 And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him,

Acts 20:38 Sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship.

What a wonderful scene to see! How much the elders of Ephesus appreciated Paul's ministry!

Comment: Earlier Paul said he wept over them for three years, and now they wept at his departure (Acts 20:31).

Acts 21:1 And it came to pass, that after we were gotten from them, and had launched, we came with a straight course unto Coos, and the day following unto Rhodes, and from thence unto Patara:

Acts 21:2 And finding a ship sailing over unto Phenicia, we went aboard, and set forth.

Acts 21:3 Now when we had discovered Cyprus, we left it on the left hand, and sailed into Syria, and landed at Tyre: for there the ship was to unlade her burden.

What does the clause "After we were gotten from them" mean? Paul was saying, "After we had torn ourselves away from the elders of Ephesus following the tearful farewell, we went by boat from Miletus down around the underbelly of Asia Minor." Coos and Rhodes were islands in the south Aegean Sea. Wind and tide favored a "straight" (unhindered) course. Phoenicia was southern Lebanon. At that time, Syria included much of northern Lebanon.

Verses 1-3 are like a diary, telling where they sailed without incident.

Acts 21:4 And finding disciples, we tarried there seven days: who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem.

Paul and those with him stayed in Tyre for seven days. The brethren there were given a message of the Holy Spirit that persecution awaited Paul in Jerusalem. Some of the disciples then mixed in their own reasoning and tried to dissuade Paul from going to Jerusalem because of the persecution. Providence is often hard to interpret because it can be considered two different ways. Prayer and acute observation are necessary—and in some cases, even fasting to the intent that God would overrule in helping to discern the providence the right way. Sometimes providence is merely a test, for God “proves” us to know whether we love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength by allowing those of the wrong spirit to speak as though it is the right spirit (Deut. 8:2; Judg. 3:4).

Acts 21:5 And when we had accomplished those days, we departed and went our way; and they all brought us on our way, with wives and children, till we were out of the city: and we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed.

Acts 21:6 And when we had taken our leave one of another, we took ship; and they returned home again.

The whole congregation (disciples, wives, and children) accompanied Paul to the outskirts of the city and back to the boat. All kneeled down on the shore and prayed.

Acts 21:7 And when we had finished our course from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, and saluted the brethren, and abode with them one day.

Acts 21:8 And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him.

Paul journeyed southward from Tyre to Ptolemais (near Haifa) for one day. Then he went on to Caesarea to the home of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven deacons appointed back in Jerusalem (Acts 6:2,3).

Acts 21:9 And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy.

Acts 21:10 And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judaea a certain prophet, named Agabus.

Philip the evangelist had four unmarried daughters who prophesied. Paul tarried at his house for many days, perhaps for rest and fellowship.

Acts 21:11 And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.

The Old Testament prophets frequently enacted little dramas when they prophesied. For example, Jeremiah used a yoke, Isaiah prophesied with bare buttocks, and Ezekiel lay on one side for 390 days and then on the other side for 40 days (Jer. 27:2; Isa. 20:1-4; Ezek. 4:1-8). The Jews were given to signs, and the Lord catered to that predilection on some occasions. In a similar enactment, Agabus bound his own hands and feet to dramatize a prophecy of Paul's apprehension in Jerusalem, but Paul had courage and faith to go willingly into that persecution.

Acts 21:12 And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem.

“We” refers to Luke and those accompanying Paul. “They” applies to the local brethren. Paul went to Jerusalem despite their urgings to the contrary. Incidentally, this was the second attempt by brethren to dissuade Paul from going to Jerusalem (Acts 21:4). Also, we are reminded of Peter’s telling Jesus not to go to Jerusalem: “Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee” (Matt. 16:22).

Acts 21:13 Then Paul answered, 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.

The brethren wept, but Paul replied, “I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.” He said to Timothy a little later, “For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. 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” (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

Acts 21:14 And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done.

Acts 21:15 And after those days we took up our carriages, and went up to Jerusalem.

Their “carriages” were their suitcases and baggage. Apparently, quite a company went with Paul to Jerusalem, and they took food and provisions for their stay during the Feast of Pentecost, as food and lodging were not always available because of the millions who came for the feast. Many slept on the ground. For example, Jesus and the apostles seemed to frequent the Garden of Gethsemane, which was a choice spot.

Acts 21:16 There went with us also certain of the disciples of Caesarea, and brought with them one Mnason of Cyprus, an old disciple, with whom we should lodge.

Acts 21:17 And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly.

Acts 21:18 And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present.

Paul and his companions lodged in Jerusalem with Mnason of Cyprus, an older brother who had been a disciple for many years. “James” was James Alphaeus, for James Zebedee was dead. The brethren at Jerusalem were happy to see Paul the next day. All elders were present, for news had spread rapidly of Paul’s arrival.

Acts 21:19 And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry.

Acts 21:20 And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law:

Acts 21:21 And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs.

Acts 21:22 What is it therefore? the multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that thou art come.

Acts 21:23 Do therefore this that we say to thee: We have four men which have a vow on them;

Acts 21:24 Them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads: and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing; but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law.

Acts 21:25 As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication.

Acts 21:26 Then Paul took the men, and the next day purifying himself with them entered into the temple, to signify the accomplishment of the days of purification, until that an offering should be offered for every one of them.

“Many thousands of Jews ... which believe ... are all zealous of the law”; that is, although many thousands of Jews became Christians, they continued to follow the Law faithfully. It was difficult for some to discard their old beliefs. For this reason, some of the brethren advised Paul to minimize any confrontations with the Jews by shaving his head under the Nazarite vow and going to the Temple with four others who had also taken Nazarite vows and shaved their heads.

Many Jewish Christians urged Christians to obey the Law as well as the precepts of Christ. With the Galatians, Paul had tried to show that the Jew was no longer obligated to follow the ceremonial features of the Law but that *voluntary* compliance was permissible under certain circumstances. Making the Law *mandatory* was the wrong principle. For example, Paul refused to have Titus circumcised but did have Timothy circumcised (Gal. 2:3-5; Acts 16:1-3). To the Jews, Paul was a Jew, and to the Gentiles, he was a Gentile in order to win converts (1 Cor. 9:20,21). In other words, to comply with a feature of the Law under peer pressure would be compromising principle, but to voluntarily, in advance, follow a custom of the Jews was a different matter. If a Jewish Christian wanted to take a Nazarite vow or to tear his clothes and put ashes on his head in connection with mourning, he could do so.

Here in Jerusalem at the time of Pentecost, the brethren thought Paul would be better received and heard by both Jews and Jewish Christians if he did not appear too radical. Contrary to comments from three *Reprint* articles in the *Expanded Biblical Comments*, Paul properly followed the advice of the brethren. Although his actions boomeranged, as we shall subsequently see, he was correct to take the Nazarite vow and go with the other four.

On multiple occasions, Paul had demonstrated his courage, so he was not peer-pressured into taking the vow. He was simply listening to advice from the brethren, and he had been solicitous of going to Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost, evidently intending to take a vow anyway. When the brethren realized his intention, they suggested that he go to the Temple with four others. That way people would see him and conclude he was not that radical, for sometimes people exaggerate what they seem to think is a fault in others. From a sanctified common-sense standpoint, Paul’s following the advice of the brethren might have brought positive results, but as the Lord had foreseen, trouble would ensue and Paul had been told earlier what awaited him in Jerusalem. His reply was, “I am ready to be bound in Jerusalem and to die for Christ” (Acts 21:13 paraphrase).

And in regard to wisdom, Paul had more wisdom than any of the other brethren. Therefore, he acted within his rights. On another occasion, Paul said that he could eat meat offered to idols but that doing so might stumble others. Offering meat to an idol did not affect the meat, for the idol was like a nonexistent entity. However, he was very careful in regard to the consciences of others. While he felt free to do certain things, he refrained when doing so would offend a brother. Paul was considerate of the feelings of others, and now, in this situation in Jerusalem, he was considerate of the brethren who were giving him advice.

Comment: Paul was told that persecution awaited him, so he may have followed this advice for an even higher motive, which was to show the brethren that whatever Providence determined would happen and nothing man could do would change the situation. Then his actions in following the advice would be even more to his credit.

Comment: It was difficult for some to make the transition from the Law to liberty in Christ, and Paul was trying to help them.

Acts 21:27 And when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him,

Acts 21:28 Crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place.

Acts 21:29 (For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.)

Acts 21:30 And all the city was moved, and the people ran together: and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple: and forthwith the doors were shut.

These Asian Jews, who were hostile toward Paul, had been following him. The hostility had started up in Galatia, Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. Now they spotted Paul in the Temple and emotionally aroused the multitude against him with cries of “Men of Israel, HELP!” Imagine being one of the multitude and hearing this cry. The natural reaction was to assume the words were correct and to react emotionally without waiting to examine the matter dispassionately. Thus the multitude came to the assistance of the Asian Jews.

These Jews had seen Greeks in Paul’s presence the day or so before. Now, blinded with hatred and prejudice, they falsely assumed that the four bald-headed men going into the Temple with Paul were the same Greeks and that they were desecrating the holy place. The Asian Jews created a riot with their accusations, which were *evil surmising*, for Paul had done no such thing.

Comment: Only Paul was seized and not those with him.

Reply: Paul was seized as the ringleader and dragged out of the Temple. The animosity of the Asian Jews was concentrated on Paul.

Acts 21:31 And as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar.

Acts 21:32 Who immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down unto them: and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they left beating of Paul.

Acts 21:33 Then the chief captain came near, and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains; and demanded who he was, and what he had done.

In anger the Jews dragged Paul out of the Temple and beat him—until the Roman soldiers arrived. It did not take long for crowd hysteria to develop, and “Jerusalem was in an uproar.” The Romans “rescued” Paul, bound him with two chains (probably hoping to pacify the crowd), and interrogated him to find out what he had done.

Comment: Jerusalem was providentially under the control of the Romans, for despite some hardships, their authority helped at times to preserve, or prolong, the lives of the apostles.

Paul kept a level head even under great, great pressure. Temperament was a factor. Whereas Peter, for example, was impulsive by nature, Paul had the same zeal and was emotional but had a different personality. Paul was very similar in temperament to Moses. Moses got angry—he was impulsive and emotional at times—but justifiably so with righteous indignation.

Acts 21:34 And some cried one thing, some another, among the multitude: and when he could not know the certainty for the tumult, he commanded him to be carried into the castle.

Acts 21:35 And when he came upon the stairs, so it was, that he was borne of the soldiers for the violence of the people.

With the commotion of the crowd, the Romans could not discern the reason for the tumult. Therefore, they carried Paul aloft, away from the crowd, to the castle for further interrogation. Of the two chains binding Paul, one chain was on his hands, and one was on his feet, as prophesied by Agabus (Acts 21:10,11).

Acts 21:36 For the multitude of the people followed after, crying, Away with him.

Acts 21:37 And as Paul was to be led into the castle, he said unto the chief captain, May I speak unto thee? Who said, Canst thou speak Greek?

The multitude was crying, “Away with him!” similar to the way Jesus was treated at the end of his ministry. Before Paul went into the castle, he asked to speak with the chief captain. (Under this circumstance, it would have done no good to speak to a subordinate.) The captain then asked Paul, “Can you speak Greek?” Evidently, Paul had made the request in Greek, and the captain was surprised and very impressed, recognizing that Paul was no ordinary person.

The Romans knew both Greek and Latin. All civil suits were conducted in Latin, but the language of the better educated was Greek, which was considered the international language of that day.

Acts 21:38 Art not thou that Egyptian, which before these days madest an uproar, and leddest out into the wilderness four thousand men that were murderers?

The chief captain thought he recognized Paul, but it was a case of mistaken identity. The Egyptians were known for their special Greek accent, especially the Alexandrian Greeks. Thus we can appreciate Apollos, a learned Grecian Jew from Alexandria who exhorted with power and was eloquent (Acts 18:24).

Acts 21:39 But Paul said, I am a man which am a Jew of Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city: and, I beseech thee, suffer me to speak unto the people.

Paul identified himself as a citizen of Tarsus and thus a *Roman* citizen. Because of Paul’s Roman citizenship, the chief captain let him speak. The citizens of certain cities in Asia Minor that either

donated a large amount of money to the coffers of Rome for a particular purpose or were instrumental in helping the Romans defeat an enemy were sometimes given *carte blanche* Roman citizenship. Apparently, the chief captain knew that Tarsus was one of these free cities.

The normal procedure with someone who created a riot was to teach the individual a lesson. The process of scourging was almost automatic.

Acts 21:40 And when he had given him licence, Paul stood on the stairs, and beckoned with the hand unto the people. And when there was made a great silence, he spake unto them in the Hebrew tongue, saying,

Paul beckoned to the crowd, and as silence came, he began to address the people in Hebrew. Although Paul had used Greek to ask the chief captain for permission to speak, he now addressed the Jews in Hebrew (Acts 21:37).

Acts 22:1 Men, brethren, and fathers, hear ye my defence which I make now unto you.

Acts 22:2 (And when they heard that he spake in the Hebrew tongue to them, they kept the more silence: and he saith,)

Acts 22:3 I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day.

Paul began his address the same way Stephen did, to all males: “Men, brethren, and fathers” (Acts 7:2). The “fathers” were the religious leaders. The hearers “kept the more silence” when they heard Paul speak in Hebrew, for they may have surmised that he was a Grecian Jew, having his origin among the Gentiles. His reputation was that he was changing the Law, so when he spoke in educated Hebrew, they were surprised. Paul explained that although born in Tarsus, he was brought up in Jerusalem, where he received strict doctrines “at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers.” Until his conversion, Paul was a zealous Jew just like the Jews he was now addressing. He did not want any heretical doctrine to be introduced into the religion but desired the religion to remain “perfect” as taught by Moses and the Law. In other words, Paul credited those he was addressing as having that same type of zeal, which was a good quality, but it needed direction or adjustment.

Acts 22:4 And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women.

Acts 22:5 As also the high priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the elders: from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus, to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem, for to be punished.

Paul said that his zeal had been similar to what his persecutors were now manifesting in accusing him of introducing foreign ideas into their religion. *In zeal* Paul had persecuted Christians—until his eyes were opened. The fact that the high priest was a witness to Paul’s previous actions should have borne weight, for in religious matters, Paul previously had rapport at the highest level of government and was also quite conversant with the Sanhedrin. Being brought up with strict doctrines, he was very knowledgeable. If fair-minded, the “elders” could attest to Paul’s previous behavior prior to conversion.

Moreover, Paul “received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus, to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem, for to be punished.” When several Jewish Christians

were apprehended and imprisoned in Damascus, the Jews of that city sent letters to the Jews in Jerusalem, asking what to do with the prisoners. Paul was commissioned to go to Damascus and bring the Jewish Christians back as prisoners. The “brethren” in this instance were *Jewish* brethren (remember how Paul had started his discourse: “Men, brethren, and fathers”). Paul was trying to identify himself as being a loyal Jew.

Comment: The “letters” were mentioned earlier: “And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem” (Acts 9:1,2).

Reply: The letters gave Paul not only permission to bring back those Jewish Christians who were already in prison but also the authority and the liberty to order the arrest of others and to bring them all back, bound, to Jerusalem. “Letters” (plural) indicates that the Jews in Damascus had written to others in addition to the high priest. No doubt Paul, with his high contacts and familiarity with the leadership, was apprised of the letters and thus knew about the dilemma. The problem was ticklish because the Jews, being under foreign control, were not at liberty to do just what they wanted. Learning of the problem, Paul zealously volunteered to undertake the service (Acts 26:10,11).

In his speech, Paul was trying to strike a chord of recognition among those whom he was addressing, saying that he formerly believed exactly as they did but *even more so*. He was trying to get their attention so that they would give more weight to what he was about to say. The Jews should have seen the reasonableness of Paul’s logic.

Comment: Following the proper principle, Paul publicly confessed his sins over and over.

Comment: Later Paul said, “And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief” (1 Tim. 1:12,13).

Reply: Paul received mercy, but he also received stripes. Sins of ignorance are still sins and sometimes receive stripes, but sins *not* of ignorance definitely receive stripes. Under the Law, sins *of ignorance* could be forgiven, but a price had to be paid. Sins *not of ignorance* had to receive stripes. No amount of sacrifices, donations, or crying would excuse willful sins. Paul said his sins were of ignorance. Had they been willful and against his conscience, to that extent he would have been culpable. Rather, he was so indoctrinated with the strictness of the law of the Pharisees that he was oblivious to his wrong course.

Acts 22:6 And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me.

In theatrical presentations, a spotlight sometimes shines on the individual who is about to speak. When the bright light shone down upon Paul, he would have been cognizant, in a fearful sense, that he was the center of attention. He would have wondered why the light was concentrated on him. And only he was blinded because of that concentration. A bright light shining with such density of concentration at noontime was a light *above light*. Incidentally, the “great light” is a proof that Jesus now had the divine nature (Acts 26:13).

Acts 22:7 And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

Acts 22:8 And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth,

whom thou persecutest.

Acts 22:9 And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me.

This demonstration was selective in different respects. The others with Paul were not blinded because they were outside the light. Paul, hearing Jesus' voice but not being able to see his features, called out, "Who art thou, Lord [superior one]?" How startling—almost like electric shock treatment—for Paul to hear, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"

The voice replied, "I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest." What a wonderful statement that was in many ways. This *great superior* being, who was hated by the leadership of Israel, was Jesus from *disesteemed* Nazareth. Now Paul began to understand. The response shows that the persecution of true Christians is counted as a persecution of Jesus. The others with Paul did not hear the "voice"; that is, they heard a sound but could not distinguish the words.

Dramatizations sometimes show that light is associated with a person's being translated to another world or planet. Next, the individual is shown encased with a glass or transparent dome. With this bright light, the words spoken to Paul could not be distinguished outside the dome. He was encased in a cone of light that acted like a sound barrier. The sound heard outside was muffled or distorted beyond recognition, and thus was without meaning.

Acts 22:10 And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do.

Acts 22:11 And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus.

Paul's native humility was manifested in his next question, which was the perfect response: "What shall I do, Lord?" In spite of his education and determination, he was humble because he realized that he had done wrong. The Lord instructed him, "Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of *all things* which are appointed for thee to do." Jesus was saying, "It is not propitious to talk to you now. Go to Damascus, and there I will answer your question and tell you what to do."

Comment: All the way back to Damascus, Paul's conscience would have troubled him. He would be expecting punishment and not a great commission.

Reply: Yes, while being led *blindly* the rest of the way to Damascus, Paul would have felt guilty and would have expected punishment. He "could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand." Prior to this experience, he was riding on a horse. Now he was off his "high horse" and walking and being led by the hand. These circumstances further humbled Paul. Similarly, many of us have to be brought to realize the baseness of our character. After seeing that inherently we are not worthy of mercy, we are amenable to proper instruction in righteousness.

Acts 22:12 And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there,

Acts 22:13 Came unto me, and stood, and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. And the same hour I looked up upon him.

Acts 22:14 And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know

his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth.

Acts 22:15 For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard.

Acts 22:16 And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.

The Lord had said, “It shall be told thee.” Therefore, Paul knew that the agent Jesus would select to perform that service would be worthy. The fact that Ananias, a *Christian*, then addressed him on an equal level as “brother” was comforting.

Not instantly but “the same *hour*” that Ananias said, “Brother Saul, receive thy sight,” Paul’s sight was restored, at least partially. One reason for the delay was that it took a while for the scales to fall off Paul’s burned eyes. Notice that Paul was kneeling, for he “looked up.” To have Paul’s sight come gradually was beneficial to Ananias too, for Ananias realized he was not the cause but merely the agent.

“The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his [Jesus’] mouth.” How wonderful! In other words, “God has chosen *you*, Saul, to know His will and to see and hear Jesus.” The “Just One” (Jesus) is the antitypical propitiatory lid of the mercy seat on the Ark of the Covenant. On that slab, the blood of the bullock was struck in the form of a cross. God’s Justice was manifested to men through the crucified Christ. Stated another way, God’s Justice was satisfied when, according to His plan, His Son was given the privilege of suffering. Since redemption and mercy can come only through Jesus, it is through him that we receive justification.

Q: Did Paul literally hear Jesus’ “mouth”?

A: Yes, not only here but elsewhere too.

Paul was told that he was to be *Jesus’* witness “unto all men” of what he had seen and heard on the way to Damascus. The gospel had to be identified with *Jesus*, not God, so that it would not be confused with the Law. Paul recounted his experience over and over not just because it was miraculous but because he was given a mandate to tell what had happened en route to Damascus. One of the leading arguments against the ministry of the Apostle Paul in the minds of his fellow Jews was, “When did he see Jesus? He was not called during Jesus’ earthly ministry.” Therefore, Paul had to repeatedly recount the experience of how Jesus called him and show that he was instructed of Jesus just as much as the others. Of course Paul’s having received the instruction of Gamaliel and being a Pharisee of the Pharisees was a great advantage when his zeal was redirected and the Holy Spirit opened up his understanding of the gospel.

When Jesus was baptized, the heavens were opened to him, meaning that the knowledge of his preexistence flooded his mind. As a result, he went into the wilderness to fast and pray to know how to apply the knowledge. According to the Scriptures, he knew he was the Savior, but knowledge of his preexistence was another matter. Similarly, Paul was now in awe of the understanding he was given, and other Scriptures tell that he sought solitude in the wilderness to discern God’s will for him.

Paul was told to “be baptized, and wash away ... [his] sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” Baptism combines two elements: (1) forgiveness of sins with (2) immersion (full consecration) into *Jesus’* death. Questions at the time we symbolize our consecration prove this connection. “Do you recognize you are a sinner? Do you accept Jesus as your personal Savior?” An affirmative response is verbal recognition of our need for cleansing through Jesus’ precious

blood. Paul received *Jesus'* baptism, not John's.

Q: Was there a time lapse before Ananias said, "Why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized"? Wouldn't Paul have been overwhelmed and have needed time to think?

Comment: Paul was already dedicated to the Lord, so it was just a matter of recognizing that he had sinned and thus needed washing and cleansing to continue on with his full service to the Lord.

Reply: Yes, and he could sort this out too as time went on. For now, he took the most logical step. He was overwhelmed that the God of Israel's fathers had called him and that he was being given personal instruction. Anyone who is serious and earnest would be very sober under such a situation and would listen intently to the Lord's instructions.

Acts 22:17 And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance;

Acts 22:18 And saw him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me.

Acts 22:19 And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee:

Acts 22:20 And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him.

Paul's initial itinerary was as follows. He went from Damascus into the wilderness, then he returned to Damascus and preached there, and next he went to Jerusalem. Thus there was a time gap between his baptism and his going to Jerusalem. The three years included Paul's being in the wilderness and returning to Damascus to preach (Gal. 1:17,18). When the Jews wanted to murder him and were watching the gates, the brethren let him down in a basket over the wall, and then he traveled to Jerusalem. In other words, three years later Paul went to Jerusalem.

While in Jerusalem, Paul sought out the Lord's brothers and also spoke with Peter, probably wanting information about Jesus' early life and upbringing. As an apostle, Paul wanted to be prepared for any question that might arise henceforth in his ministry. After seeing the local brethren and preaching publicly, he went to the Temple, and while there, Jesus appeared to him in a vision and told him to get away from Jerusalem quickly, for his preaching had incurred great wrath and the Jews would not receive him.

Paul replied at the time (paraphrased), "Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue those who believed on you. And in addition to all that I have done—beating and persecuting and actually killing Christians—I assisted in Stephen's death, even holding his raiment." Paul's words are very revealing, for they show that he had the proper attitude. Not only was he willing to die back there as retribution for his past actions, but he felt, correctly, that public sin should be publicly confessed. He was saying in effect, "I killed Christians here in this city, and now I have a responsibility to tell the people that I was wrong. My eyes have been opened." However, God intended to use Paul and did not want him to be put to death at that time. Therefore, through providence, Paul was instructed to leave Jerusalem quickly. Of course the brethren were only too happy to help him leave. Another account tells that they escorted him up to Caesarea, etc., where the local prejudice was not so strong (Acts 9:30).

Paul was recounting how earlier he had been told to depart from Jerusalem and could not

preach as intended, but now, years later, he was testifying to the people there. He felt the responsibility to testify and hence had requested permission to do so (Acts 21:39).

Comment: If Paul's motives are not understood, it might seem that he was remonstrating with the Lord here.

Reply: Native humility was part of his character.

Acts 22:21 And he said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles.

Jesus told Paul to depart, for he would send Paul "far hence unto the Gentiles." Paul was getting the same lesson over and over. He had more visions, prophecies, tongues, and understanding than any of the other disciples. Truly Paul declared the whole gospel. He unburdened his heart and spoke the truth. Although he did not use unnecessary decorum, he was very respectful.

Acts 22:22 And they gave him audience unto this word, and then lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live.

Acts 22:23 And as they cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air,

Acts 22:24 The chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle, and bade that he should be examined by scourging; that he might know wherefore they cried so against him.

What an *unreasonable* and emotional reaction by the Jews to a *reasonable* testimony! Being unaware of any guilt, the chief captain was puzzled by the Jews' reaction and, therefore, ordered Paul to be "examined by scourging." He assumed Paul had done some terrible thing and wanted to know what he was hiding for such an uproar to result.

Acts 22:25 And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?

Acts 22:26 When the centurion heard that, he went and told the chief captain, saying, Take heed what thou doest: for this man is a Roman.

Acts 22:27 Then the chief captain came, and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, Yea.

It was not lawful to scourge an uncondemned Roman citizen.

Acts 22:28 And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom. And Paul said, But I was free born.

Acts 22:29 Then straightway they departed from him which should have examined him: and the chief captain also was afraid, after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him.

Acts 22:30 On the morrow, because he would have known the certainty wherefore he was accused of the Jews, he loosed him from his bands, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down, and set him before them.

If Paul had not declared his Roman citizenship, he would have been "examined," that is, tortured (for the purpose of getting a confession). Paul's father was free, so Paul was "free born."

Acts 23:1 And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.

Acts 23:2 And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth.

Acts 23:3 Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?

Paul stated that he had “lived in all good conscience before God” up to the present. When Ananias commanded that Paul be smitten on the mouth, Paul called him a “whited wall” and said his actions were contrary to the Law, which stipulated that the person being beaten had to be lying down (Deut. 25:1,2). Also, Paul’s testimony should have been heard first, and perhaps it was, for this is an abbreviated account. Paul was smitten in spite of the presence of the Roman authority. He continued to speak strongly to Ananias, saying, “God shall smite thee,” and it is likely that the high priest was subsequently smitten by God.

Comment: *Reprint* No. 4486 states, “Within two years Ananias was deposed, within six years he met a horrible death, his own son being associated with his assassins, who drew him from his hiding place in a sewer and slew him.”

Acts 23:4 And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God’s high priest?

Acts 23:5 Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.

Acts 23:6 But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question.

If Paul had known that Ananias was the high priest, he would not have spoken evil of the ruler, and he quoted a Scripture to that effect (Exod. 22:28). Then, staying calm, he used a clever stratagem; namely, he wisely introduced the subject of the resurrection to cause a reaction *between* the Sadducees and the Pharisees and thus have an opportunity to expound further on Scripture. Even though both groups were opposed to him, a dissension now occurred between them.

Q: What is the principle in regard to the end of the age? Is it that we have to be careful not to condemn an individual but that we can condemn a class?

A: Yes, that principle will apply at the end of the age. We may criticize the clerical element as a *class* but not personally as individuals. Or we can criticize the accusation or charge.

Comment: One reason Paul did not recognize the high priest may have been his poor eyesight.

Acts 23:7 And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided.

Acts 23:8 For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both.

Acts 23:9 And there arose a great cry: and the scribes that were of the Pharisees’ part arose, and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man: but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him,

let us not fight against God.

Dissension occurred. Under this circumstance, Paul did not pursue the course of Jesus, who was meek as a lamb. Paul had been taken into custody for questioning but was not yet imprisoned, so he was trying to justify his innocence.

Comment: It seems as if the Sadducees and the Pharisees were given to disputation among themselves, for the dissension erupted so readily.

Reply: Supposedly, it is quite a revelation to go to the Knesset and hear what happens when a vote comes up. The way the members talk to each other is very disconcerting. Similarly, the English Parliament is renowned for shouting, and fist fights have even broken out. At present, Israel has the same kind of parliamentary government.

Comment: Despite the differences between them, the Sadducees and the Pharisees had the common goal of persecuting Christians.

Reply: The principle is the same with the nominal religious world today. There are some serious differences between Catholic and Protestant doctrine, but with the two sides trying to get together on an ecumenical basis, they are in strong agreement on the common foe: supposed cults who do not believe in the Trinity.

The Sadducees, who did not believe in a resurrection, also did not believe in either an “angel” or a “spirit.” In other words, they did not believe in either a materialized *visible* angel or an *invisible* spirit being (including Satan).

Acts 23:10 And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle.

Acts 23:11 And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.

Acts 23:12 And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.

Acts 23:13 And they were more than forty which had made this conspiracy.

Fearing that violence would be done to Paul personally, the chief (Roman) captain commanded the soldiers to bring him into the castle. Over and over, Paul stirred up a hornets’ nest in preaching the gospel. More than 40 Jews vowed not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul. However, Jesus assured Paul that he would not lose his life at this time but would live to testify in Rome.

Acts 23:14 And they came to the chief priests and elders, and said, We have bound ourselves under a great curse, that we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul.

Acts 23:15 Now therefore ye with the council signify to the chief captain that he bring him down unto you tomorrow, as though ye would inquire something more perfectly concerning him: and we, or ever he come near, are ready to kill him.

The more than 40 Jews who were planning the surprise attack thought they would succeed in killing Paul in an ambush en route to the hearing the next day.

Acts 23:16 And when Paul's sister's son heard of their lying in wait, he went and entered into the castle, and told Paul.

Acts 23:17 Then Paul called one of the centurions unto him, and said, Bring this young man unto the chief captain: for he hath a certain thing to tell him.

Acts 23:18 So he took him, and brought him to the chief captain, and said, Paul the prisoner called me unto him, and prayed me to bring this young man unto thee, who hath something to say unto thee.

No doubt Paul's nephew, a "young man," was amidst the multitude that had assembled and thus overheard the plot to ambush and slay Paul. A family member could get in to see a prisoner, so the nephew went and told Paul about the conspiracy. Paul asked a centurion to take the nephew to the chief captain.

Acts 23:19 Then the chief captain took him by the hand, and went with him aside privately, and asked him, What is that thou hast to tell me?

Acts 23:20 And he said, The Jews have agreed to desire thee that thou wouldest bring down Paul tomorrow into the council, as though they would inquire somewhat of him more perfectly.

Acts 23:21 But do not thou yield unto them: for there lie in wait for him of them more than forty men, which have bound themselves with an oath, that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him: and now are they ready, looking for a promise from thee.

Paul's nephew spoke privately to the chief captain. Since Roman justice was strict, the Romans would not have wanted an uncondemned man to be killed without due process of law. Hence the nephew knew that his information would help Paul if it could be told.

What a clever strategy of the Jews to *pretend* they wanted to inquire further of Paul about something that was not clear! However, their ruse was frustrated by God's providence.

Acts 23:22 So the chief captain then let the young man depart, and charged him, See thou tell no man that thou hast shown these things to me.

Acts 23:23 And he called unto him two centurions, saying, Make ready two hundred soldiers to go to Caesarea, and horsemen threescore and ten, and spearmen two hundred, at the third hour of the night;

Acts 23:24 And provide them beasts, that they may set Paul on, and bring him safe unto Felix the governor.

Since a centurion was in charge of 100 men, two centurions were in charge of 200 men. Quite a guard was ordered! Two centurions, 200 men, 200 "spearmen," and 70 horsemen took Paul "at the third hour of the night," which was probably 3 a.m. Paul was put on a beast to assure safe passage to Felix, the governor, and it is likely that his beast rode in the middle of the group for further protection. Of course Felix had more authority than the chief captain.

From a natural standpoint, it was necessary for this large number of men to accompany Paul, for if the 40 Jews realized Paul was being taken away, they could stage a surprise attack. The Jews' only purpose was to kill Paul, so after slaying him, they would desist and scatter with their mission accomplished.

Acts 23:25 And he wrote a letter after this manner:

Acts 23:26 Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix sendeth greeting.

Acts 23:27 This man was taken of the Jews, and should have been killed of them: then came I with an army, and rescued him, having understood that he was a Roman.

Acts 23:28 And when I would have known the cause wherefore they accused him, I brought him forth into their council:

Acts 23:29 Whom I perceived to be accused of questions of their law, but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of bonds.

Acts 23:30 And when it was told me how that the Jews laid wait for the man, I sent straightway to thee, and gave commandment to his accusers also to say before thee what they had against him. Farewell.

As was characteristic of Luke, the writer of the Book of Acts for Paul, *specific* details were recorded. The charge against Paul was a religious question regarding the Mosaic Law and was, therefore, not a charge worthy of death or bonds under Roman law.

The chief captain, whose name was Claudius Lysias, wrote how the Jews had accused Paul and “laid wait” for him. Evidently, the chief captain contacted the Jews who had been conniving to assassinate Paul, telling them to bring formal charges (if they felt they had any) before Felix, the governor. The short letter may have been recorded word for word because the Romans were noted for their brevity of speech. “Farewell” marked the end of the letter. Incidentally, the Gospel of Mark, written for the Apostle Peter, was set forth in an *abbreviated* form to appeal to the Romans.

Acts 23:31 Then the soldiers, as it was commanded them, took Paul, and brought him by night to Antipatris.

Acts 23:32 On the morrow they left the horsemen to go with him, and returned to the castle:

The 70 horsemen went on with Paul, and the other Romans returned to the castle in Jerusalem.

Acts 23:33 Who, when they came to Caesarea, and delivered the epistle to the governor, presented Paul also before him.

Acts 23:34 And when the governor had read the letter, he asked of what province he was. And when he understood that he was of Cilicia;

Acts 23:35 I will hear thee, said he, when thine accusers are also come. And he commanded him to be kept in Herod’s judgment hall.

Evidently, the journey to Felix in Caesarea took two days, and the mass of protection was needed for only the first day. Thus the bulk of the contingent returned to the castle after one day, and the cavalry continued on with Paul to the governor. Felix read the letter and agreed to hear Paul’s case, as the chief captain had suggested. Therefore, he intended to wait until the representation from the Jewish priesthood could get to Caesarea.

Acts 24:1 And after five days Ananias the high priest descended with the elders, and with a certain orator named Tertullus, who informed the governor against Paul.

Acts 24:2 And when he was called forth, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying, Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence,

Acts 24:3 We accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness.

What persistence to chase Paul—and with the best prosecuting attorney they could find to represent their cause! Ananias and the elders brought Tertullus to present the matter in the most favorable light from the Jewish standpoint. And what hypocrisy for Tertullus to so flatter Felix! “We accept it [the providence of Felix] *always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness.*”

We can see how Jews who read the New Testament get the feeling of anti-Semitism. They find fault particularly with the Gospel of John, which uses the term “the Jews” many more times than the other Gospels.

Acts 24:4 Notwithstanding, that I be not further tedious unto thee, I pray thee that thou wouldest hear us of thy clemency a few words.

Acts 24:5 For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes:

Acts 24:6 Who also hath gone about to profane the temple: whom we took, and would have judged according to our law.

Notice how Tertullus slid into the accusation. He was saying, “We do not want to burden you with a long discussion because your time is valuable. Therefore, we beseech you for a little dispensation of your clemency to hear this matter. The charge is that we have found Paul to be ‘a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.’” The hatred and the concern of Paul’s enemies show the influence he had. His reputation for preaching the gospel was known in the civilized world of that time.

Acts 24:7 But the chief captain Lysias came upon us, and with great violence took him away out of our hands,

Acts 24:8 Commanding his accusers to come unto thee: by examining of whom thyself mayest take knowledge of all these things, whereof we accuse him.

Acts 24:9 And the Jews also assented, saying that these things were so.

False witnesses (“the Jews”) assented that the accusations against Paul were true. Tertullus and the others resented the chief captain, Lysias, for helping Paul. (When the chief captain learned of the conspiracy to assassinate Paul, he thwarted it by sending Paul to Felix by night.) The Jews themselves had been *violent*, so Lysias and his men had to be violent in order to rescue Paul and restore order. No doubt there were some broken bones and teeth as a result.

Acts 24:10 Then Paul, after that the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered, Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself:

Acts 24:11 Because that thou mayest understand, that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem for to worship.

Acts 24:12 And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city:

Acts 24:13 Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me.

Acts 24:14 But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets:

Acts 24:15 And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.

Acts 24:16 And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.

Acts 24:17 Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings.

Acts 24:18 Whereupon certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult.

Acts 24:19 Who ought to have been here before thee, and object, if they had aught against me.

Acts 24:20 Or else let these same here say, if they have found any evil doing in me, while I stood before the council,

Acts 24:21 Except it be for this one voice, that I cried standing among them, Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day.

Paul gave his defense. As a Roman citizen, he demanded a fair trial. He reminded Felix that there were no creditable witnesses of the *original* incident that sparked the accusation and resulted in his being taken into custody the first time. Paul admitted that when he had an opportunity to speak subsequently, the subject of the resurrection caused a tumult. He said that he had merely mentioned his hope in the resurrection, and the Jews disputed *among themselves*. Paul was trying to show that the charge was foolish and that the responsibility for the uproar lay with the Jews. Notice how he described the resurrection; namely, he believed in “a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.”

Paul said that the accusation arose in a twelve-day period. It took two days for him to get to Felix and five days for Ananias, the elders, and Tertullus to arrive in Caesarea. That left only five days of the twelve. Paul was trying to show that the great tumult was very recent. He voiced his innocency by asking (paraphrased), “Can you find anything in this short period of time where I did something so terrible?” When he went into the Temple for the rite of purification, he was not sermonizing on the Temple grounds and discussing doctrinal truths but was quietly and reverentially worshipping God when the Jews apprehended him. The charge against him was false, and the responsibility for the tumult lay with the Jews themselves. Thus Paul again voiced his innocency, saying he worshipped the God of his fathers. In other words, he respected the Jewish religion and believed all the things written in the Law and the prophets (the Old Testament). Paul was not teaching heretical views because his views were based on Scripture.

Comment: The feet members at the end of the age can reply as Paul did: “We are speaking according to the Holy Scriptures.”

Reply: Another similarity is that a *religious* element brought the charge against Paul.

Paul said his purpose in going to Jerusalem was to bring alms to help alleviate the suffering of some of the populace and to give donations to the Temple treasury. He came on a mission and not to stir up trouble. He was quietly worshipping God and taking a temporary Nazarite vow when all of the tumult first arose. It would have been very easy to verify what he was saying.

Acts 24:22 And when Felix heard these things, having more perfect knowledge of that way, he deferred them, and said, When Lysias the chief captain shall come down, I will know the uttermost of your matter.

Acts 24:23 And he commanded a centurion to keep Paul, and to let him have liberty, and that he should forbid none of his acquaintance to minister or come unto him.

Acts 24:24 And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ.

Felix delayed a final decision until Lysias came to Caesarea. (Felix wanted finer details from Lysias in order to ascertain the truthfulness of the charge that was laid against Paul.) Meanwhile, Paul had “liberty”; that is, he was kept in liberal confinement, being unbound and allowed to walk around, and friends could visit him. His circumstances could be considered a “prison house arrest.” Since Felix’s wife Drusilla was providentially Jewish, the governor was somewhat acquainted with the Jewish Law.

Acts 24:25 And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.

Acts 24:26 He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him.

Acts 24:27 But after two years Porcius Festus came into Felix’ room: and Felix, willing to show the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound.

Felix wanted Paul to pay a bribe for his freedom. The stalemate situation continued for *two* years.

Acts 25:1 Now when Festus was come into the province, after three days he ascended from Caesarea to Jerusalem.

Acts 25:2 Then the high priest and the chief of the Jews informed him against Paul, and besought him,

Acts 25:3 And desired favour against him, that he would send for him to Jerusalem, laying wait in the way to kill him.

Acts 25:4 But Festus answered, that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and that he himself would depart shortly thither.

Acts 25:5 Let them therefore, said he, which among you are able, go down with me, and accuse this man, if there be any wickedness in him.

Ananias was still high priest. The opposition was *persistent*, pressing for a trial once again. When Festus arrived in Jerusalem, the high priest and other chief Jews informed him about

Paul, but Festus did not comply with the Jews' request to have Paul brought there from Caesarea. Again Jews were planning to ambush and kill Paul (they were "laying wait in the way"). The first attempt to ambush him was frustrated, and now so was the second.

Acts 25:6 And when he had tarried among them more than ten days, he went down unto Caesarea; and the next day sitting on the judgment seat commanded Paul to be brought.

Acts 25:7 And when he was come, the Jews which came down from Jerusalem stood round about, and laid many and grievous complaints against Paul, which they could not prove.

Acts 25:8 While he answered for himself, Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Caesar, have I offended any thing at all.

Acts 25:9 But Festus, willing to do the Jews a pleasure, answered Paul, and said, Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things before me?

Imagine the great pressure and flattery that would have been exerted on Festus by the Jews to prejudice him if Paul had gone up to Jerusalem. When Paul was brought before Festus in Caesarea, the Jews could not prove any of the charges. Moreover, Paul denied the charges, saying he had not gone against the Law or led a riot in the Temple or opposed Caesar.

Notice that Luke's method of recording these events was to bring in a lot of detail. For instance, Festus *ascended* to Jerusalem and *went down* to Caesarea (Acts 25:1,6). Jerusalem was situated at a higher level (an altitude of about 2,400 feet), whereas Caesarea was at sea level. Also, Luke mentioned names that are recorded in history books. The purpose of the detail was to establish the authenticity of the Christian religion. The definitiveness of Luke's writing is helpful because it furnishes time periods such as which Caesar was on the throne and sometimes even the year of a reign. The Book of Acts is a historical record of what happened to Paul: his missionary journeys and the persecutions he received.

Festus was willing to please the Jews. However, because he was a person of authority, he did not want to be pushed. Even though he would have liked to honor the request of the Jews to bring Paul to Jerusalem, he felt that acceding to their request would vitiate his authority. But he kept their request in mind, and then *he* made the suggestion to have the trial in Jerusalem. Felix, too, had wanted to please the Jews (Acts 24:27).

Acts 25:10 Then said Paul, I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest.

Acts 25:11 For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Caesar.

Acts 25:12 Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? unto Caesar shalt thou go.

Acts 25:13 And after certain days king Agrippa and Bernice came unto Caesarea to salute Festus.

Paul requested that he be judged by Caesar. Every Roman citizen, especially one in a foreign land, had the right to a trial in Italy, and therefore, his request could not be denied. Thus Paul sidestepped going to Jerusalem. He said he was willing to die if he had done anything worthy of death. Also, he knew he still had a mission to accomplish, and the indication at the time of his commission in Damascus was that he should go to Rome and even appear before Caesar (Acts

9:15). Now King Agrippa providentially arrived in Caesarea with his wife Bernice, who was Jewish.

Acts 25:14 And when they had been there many days, Festus declared Paul's cause unto the king, saying, There is a certain man left in bonds by Felix:

Acts 25:15 About whom, when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, desiring to have judgment against him.

Acts 25:16 To whom I answered, It is not the manner of the Romans to deliver any man to die, before that he which is accused have the accusers face to face, and have licence to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him.

Acts 25:17 Therefore, when they were come hither, without any delay on the morrow I sat on the judgment seat, and commanded the man to be brought forth.

Acts 25:18 Against whom when the accusers stood up, they brought none accusation of such things as I supposed:

Acts 25:19 But had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.

Acts 25:20 And because I doubted of such manner of questions, I asked him whether he would go to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these matters.

Acts 25:21 But when Paul had appealed to be reserved unto the hearing of Augustus, I commanded him to be kept till I might send him to Caesar.

Acts 25:22 Then Agrippa said unto Festus, I would also hear the man myself. Tomorrow, said he, thou shalt hear him.

Festus gave a synopsis of what had transpired with Paul, the various accusations, etc. In reading this account, we get the feeling that had Paul assented to go to Jerusalem, Festus would have done something similar to what Pilate had tried to do. Knowing that Jesus was a Galilean, Pilate wanted Herod to take up the momentum of the trial and relieve him of that responsibility. But Herod had other things in mind and returned Jesus to Pilate.

Comment: Roman law said that a man must be faced by his accuser (verse 16). *Pagan Rome* had better laws than *Papal Rome*. Under *Papal Rome*, many were put to death without ever knowing who accused them.

Reply: And often they did not even know the accusation.

King Agrippa had more authority and jurisdiction than either Felix or Festus, but all were accountable to Rome. The Roman authority replaced Felix with Festus. For Festus to give deference to King Agrippa was a matter of professional courtesy. Although *Augustus Caesar* had long since died, it was customary to attach to the current emperor's name the name of a past Roman emperor who had a good reputation. King Agrippa wanted an audience with Paul, and Festus replied, "Yes, you can come tomorrow."

Bernice and Drusilla, both Jews and wives of Agrippa and Felix, respectively, were known for notorious escapades (Acts 24:24). Because there were Christian Jews in the households of the Roman rulers (maids, butlers, confidants, etc.), the rulers knew a little about Christianity and also about the customs of the Jews by reason of contact.

Acts 25:23 And on the morrow, when Agrippa was come, and Bernice, with great pomp, and was entered into the place of hearing, with the chief captains, and principal men of the city, at Festus' commandment Paul was brought forth.

Acts 25:24 And Festus said, King Agrippa, and all men which are here present with us, ye see this man, about whom all the multitude of the Jews have dealt with me, both at Jerusalem, and also here, crying that he ought not to live any longer.

Acts 25:25 But when I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death, and that he himself hath appealed to Augustus, I have determined to send him.

King Agrippa came to the hearing with regalia, pomp, and ceremony to impress Festus with his authority.

Acts 25:26 Of whom I have no certain thing to write unto my lord. Wherefore I have brought him forth before you, and specially before thee, O king Agrippa, that, after examination had, I might have somewhat to write.

Acts 25:27 For it seemeth to me unreasonable to send a prisoner, and not withal to signify the crimes laid against him.

Festus wanted King Agrippa to get a concrete charge against Paul, for it was "unreasonable" to send a prisoner to Rome without listing crimes against him. Festus was saying, "See if you can extract some information or sense from this nonsense."

Acts 26:1 Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself:

Acts 26:2 I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews:

Acts 26:3 Especially because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews: wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently.

Acts 26:4 My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews;

Acts 26:5 Which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.

Acts 26:6 And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers:

Acts 26:7 Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews.

As part of his defense, Paul said he was a follower of the Old Testament, and he referred to the Abrahamic promise. Moreover, he was a religionist in the strictest sense of the word. "Instantly" in verse 7 means "constantly."

Acts 26:8 Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?

Acts 26:9 I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

Acts 26:10 Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them.

Acts 26:11 And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.

Acts 26:12 Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests,

Acts 26:13 At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me.

Acts 26:14 And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.

Acts 26:15 And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.

Acts 26:16 But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee;

Acts 26:17 Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee,

Acts 26:18 To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

Acts 26:19 Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision:

Acts 26:20 But showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.

Acts 26:21 For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me.

Acts 26:22 Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come:

Acts 26:23 That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles.

Paul gave King Agrippa a summary of his life story, calling attention to the fact that the Jews did not talk of his past because he had been so faithful and zealous for their religion prior to his conversion.

Q: Why did Jesus say to Paul, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks”?

A: Certain unrecorded providences must have occurred to give Paul the opportunity to have his eyes opened about Jesus' being the Messiah and the wrong course he was pursuing. When Paul failed to heed the providences, God slapped him down, as it were, on the way to Damascus so that he would see the light. No doubt he had persecuted many without granting favorable and just representation. Now Paul was telling King Agrippa how his zeal for God was properly directed by the conversion experience. Paul was open and honest in his expressions, unburdening his heart. At the same time, he had to cover his life story in very few words and under pressure, for the Romans did not want a long oration. Paul showed that once he thought as the Jews did, but now he saw differently and was being persecuted for a belief in God. And he was telling people to repent and turn their hearts to God. "What is so wicked about trying to convert people to God?" he reasoned.

The light that shone was brighter than the sun at noontime. In other words, the sun was shining that day, and all of a sudden a light appeared that was brighter than the sun. It was probably something like a laser beam, which is a concentration of light along parallel lines, whereas light normally has a tendency to diffuse. When angels appeared to Daniel as "lightning," or a bright shining, he fell down. A force exists with spirit beings unless they purposely play it low-key and appear as a human being.

Acts 26:24 And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.

Acts 26:25 But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.

Acts 26:26 For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner.

Festus interrupted Paul's defense. Paul, who would have been looking at King Agrippa in making his defense, replied to Festus and went right on.

Comment: Paul took the words of Festus in stride, gave his reply, was not intimidated, and went right on. He had *no fear of man*.

Reply: Paul not only did not break his trend of thinking but also was able to weave in a witness concerning Christ as the climax to his defense. First, he gave a history of his beliefs and experiences, and then he led up to his faith in Jesus of Nazareth. King Agrippa would have known about Jesus, for the Roman rulers had their spies and representatives, especially when crowds formed.

Paul's saying, "This thing was not done in a corner," reminds us of Jesus' remark, "I spake openly to the world; ... in secret have I said nothing" (John 18:20).

Comment: Paul used the address "most noble Festus."

Reply: Yes, it was proper for Paul to follow decorum. He was not effusive with flattery like Tertullus, but he did show respect for the office.

Acts 26:27 King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest.

Acts 26:28 Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.

Acts 26:29 And Paul 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.

Acts 26:30 And when he had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that sat with them:

King Agrippa said to Paul, “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.” He was getting a little touchy. Then he “rose up,” giving a tacit signal, as it were, and the others followed suit, thus terminating Paul’s defense. King Agrippa did not want to be persuaded any further. However, he was forming opinions and thinking about the case and the lack of witnesses. He saw the falseness of the charge against Paul and realized he should not have been imprisoned for such a length of time.

Comment: It is interesting that Paul said to King Agrippa, “I know that thou believest.” The king must have had some understanding.

Reply: Yes, something must have happened in the past that evidenced his faith. Also, his wife was a Jewess, and he had jurisdiction over Israel.

Comment: Paul could probably tell from facial expressions that the king believed.

Reply: The king may even have gently nodded his head.

Acts 26:31 And when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds.

Acts 26:32 Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar.

Felix had put Paul under house arrest, hoping to get a bribe, but the bribe was not forthcoming. Festus could have released Paul for lack of evidence but did not do so. Now fact gathering was again attempted, and evidence was lacking. Paul was playing into the hands of providence, which indicated he was to go to Rome. While under prison house arrest, he had had two to three years to analyze the circumstance and what God’s will was for him. In determining providence and the meaning of the experience, he realized the Lord wanted him to go to Rome, and he knew the surest way to get free passage was to appeal his case to Caesar and go as a prisoner.

Acts 27:1 And when it was determined that we should sail into Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners unto one named Julius, a centurion of Augustus’ band.

Acts 27:2 And entering into a ship of Adramyttium, we launched, meaning to sail by the coasts of Asia; one Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, being with us.

Acts 27:3 And the next day we touched at Sidon. And Julius courteously entreated Paul, and gave him liberty to go unto his friends to refresh himself.

Acts 27:4 And when we had launched from thence, we sailed under Cyprus, because the winds were contrary.

Acts 27:5 And when we had sailed over the sea of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, a city of Lycia.

Paul was taken by boat from Caesarea north along the Lebanese coast to Sidon. Julius, the

Roman guard who had jurisdiction of the prisoners, was courteous to Paul and gave him shore leave to see his friends “to refresh himself.” Julius knew Paul would not run away, for if Paul did, he would be a fugitive and would have to answer to Caesar.

The pronoun “we” signifies that Luke accompanied Paul (and perhaps Aristarchus also). Luke gave details of the sailing itinerary. After the ship left Sidon, a storm arose with strong winds that prevented it from sailing the regular route north of Cyprus. Instead the ship sailed south of Cyprus and landed at Myra, a city of Lycia, on the way to Italy.

Acts 27:6 And there the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing into Italy; and he put us therein.

Acts 27:7 And when we had sailed slowly many days, and scarce were come over against Cnidus, the wind not suffering us, we sailed under Crete, over against Salmone;

Acts 27:8 And, hardly passing it, came unto a place which is called The fair havens; nigh whereunto was the city of Lasea.

Acts 27:9 Now when much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past, Paul admonished them,

At Myra, the centurion demanded passage on another ship for himself and Paul and company. During his ministry, Jesus said that if a Roman citizen exercised his liberty by compelling a Jew to carry a burden a mile, the Jew was to carry it two miles. In other words, he was to obey and not begrudge the command for assistance. No doubt the principle was the same with a ship. With the authority of Caesar, a centurion could demand free passage on a boat that was going to a desired destination.

Again because of the weather, the route was altered, and the boat sailed south of (“under”) the island of Crete so that the island would act as a buffer from the wind blowing from the north. “The fast [the Day of Atonement—see King James margin] was now already past,” and the foul weather season had begun. The Mediterranean is known to be treacherous in certain areas at that time of the year.

Acts 27:10 And said unto them, Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives.

Acts 27:11 Nevertheless the centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul.

Acts 27:12 And because the haven was not commodious to winter in, the more part advised to depart thence also, if by any means they might attain to Phenice, and there to winter; which is an haven of Crete, and lieth toward the south west and north west.

Against Paul’s advice through the gift of prophecy, the ship left Lasea to winter in Phenice, which was on the island of Crete and was more “commodious.” Notice how Luke described the island’s twisted shape in the Mediterranean Sea; namely, it “lieth toward the south west and north west.”

Acts 27:13 And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, loosing thence, they sailed close by Crete.

Acts 27:14 But not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon.

Acts 27:15 And when the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, we let her drive.

Acts 27:16 And running under a certain island which is called Clauda, we had much work to come by the boat:

Acts 27:17 Which when they had taken up, they used helps, undergirding the ship; and, fearing lest they should fall into the quicksands, strake sail, and so were driven.

When a tempestuous wind arose, the sails were dropped so that the ship would “drive.” Otherwise, the strong wind would have put too much strain on the boat. Also, because the sails would make the boat go twice as fast, the sailors would lose control of the steering.

The ship went south of the island of Clauda. There were dangerous “quicksands” (shoals) near the shore of the island.

Acts 27:18 And we being exceedingly tossed with a tempest, the next day they lightened the ship;

Acts 27:19 And the third day we cast out with our own hands the tackling of the ship.

Acts 27:20 And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away.

Acts 27:21 But after long abstinence Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss.

Acts 27:22 And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man’s life among you, but of the ship.

It was dark for many days in the severe storm. On the third day, the tackling was cast overboard to lighten the ship. “After long abstinence” of fasting during the storm to know the meaning, Paul spoke, “Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete.... And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man’s life among you, but of the ship.”

Acts 27:23 For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve,

Acts 27:24 Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.

Acts 27:25 Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me.

Acts 27:26 Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island.

Acts 27:27 But when the fourteenth night was come, as we were driven up and down in Adria, about midnight the shipmen deemed that they drew near to some country;

Acts 27:28 And sounded, and found it twenty fathoms: and when they had gone a little further, they sounded again, and found it fifteen fathoms.

Acts 27:29 Then fearing lest we should have fallen upon rocks, they cast four anchors out of

the stern, and wished for the day.

Acts 27:30 And as the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let down the boat into the sea, under colour as though they would have cast anchors out of the foreship,

The “shipmen” tried to stay the ship with anchors and a tow line—at night. They knew land was near because the water was getting shallower. Pretending to put out more anchors, some intended to flee in a little boat.

Acts 27:31 Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved.

Acts 27:32 Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off.

Acts 27:33 And while the day was coming on, Paul besought them all to take meat, saying, This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing.

Acts 27:34 Wherefore I pray you to take some meat: for this is for your health: for there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you.

Paul told the centurion and the soldiers that unless they remained on the ship, they would not be saved. Harkening to Paul, the soldiers cut the ropes of the little boat, and everyone stayed on the ship. All of them had fasted for 14 days. Now Paul instructed them to eat, for they would all live.

Acts 27:35 And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all: and when he had broken it, he began to eat.

Acts 27:36 Then were they all of good cheer, and they also took some meat.

Acts 27:37 And we were in all in the ship two hundred threescore and sixteen souls.

Acts 27:38 And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea.

Paul gave thanks, ate, and was cheerful. The 276 men on the ship followed his lead and did likewise, also being of “good cheer.” They had to trust Paul to then cast out the wheat, which was a staple, but Paul had them fill up with food first. By this time, Julius would have believed Paul and, accordingly, have given the command.

Comment: The sailors realized that such an *intense 14-day storm* was unusual. This realization helped them hearken to Paul.

Reply: We are reminded of the intense storm Jonah experienced. Finally he said, “I am the problem. Throw me overboard, and then the sea will become calm.” The current *long 14-day storm* with Paul and the others was a very foreboding experience. To the superstitious soldiers, it seemed as if the demons were loose. The reality of the experience was certainly etched in the minds of everyone there.

Acts 27:39 And when it was day, they knew not the land: but they discovered a certain creek with a shore, into the which they were minded, if it were possible, to thrust in the ship.

Acts 27:40 And when they had taken up the anchors, they committed themselves unto the sea, and loosed the rudder bands, and hoisted up the mainsail to the wind, and made toward shore.

Acts 27:41 And falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the forepart stuck fast, and remained unmoveable, but the hinderpart was broken with the violence of the waves.

Acts 27:42 And the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out, and escape.

Acts 27:43 But the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from their purpose; and commanded that they which could swim should cast themselves first into the sea, and get to land:

Acts 27:44 And the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land.

Julius the centurion was impressed with Paul and wanted to spare him, so all of the prisoners were spared. Under Roman law, if a prisoner escaped, the one or ones in charge would be executed. Now all of the prisoners were isolated on an unknown island with the local inhabitants. Everyone from the ship arrived safely, as Paul had prophesied after fasting and being so informed by an angel in a vision.

Acts 28:1 And when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita.

Paul, the centurion, and the others were shipwrecked on the isle of Melita (called Malta today). The angel in the vision had told Paul that none would perish, and all from the boat did get safely onto the island, even though the boat was completely destroyed. Those who could not swim clung to pieces of the wreckage and thus got to shore.

Comment: A Bible map calls water at Melita "St. Paul's Bay." Apparently, the bay was named for him after he left.

Acts 28:2 And the barbarous people showed us no little kindness: for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold.

Paul, the soldiers, and the others arrived on Melita under tumultuous circumstances. Not only were they drenched from the sea, but when they came on shore, they were shivering in the cold and rainy weather. The "barbarous people" kindly warmed them by fire. The natives were "barbarous" in the sense of being uncivilized Gentiles.

Acts 28:3 And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand.

Acts 28:4 And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live.

Acts 28:5 And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm.

Acts 28:6 Howbeit they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly: but after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god.

Although not a young man, Paul was active in gathering sticks and helping temporally. The fire providentially would have been quite large. When Paul laid his bundle of sticks on the fire, the intense heat caused a venomous “viper” (probably a scorpion) to come forth from the midst of the sticks. Fastening itself on Paul’s hand, the viper bit him and hung there until Paul shook it off into the fire; that is, Paul did not even flinch but simply shook off the scorpion into the fire. A scorpion arches its tail over its head, and then the tail zooms down and fastens itself into an individual like a hypodermic needle.

At first, the superstitious people thought Paul was a *murderer* because of the scorpion on his hand, and they expected him to grow weaker, become swollen, and die. Thus they watched him very closely to see the reaction, but Paul “felt no harm.” When no hurt came to Paul, the people changed their minds and thought he was a *god*. The firelight illuminated the entire incident as if it were occurring on a stage.

We are reminded of the account where Elisha sent his servant to anoint Jehu to be king over Israel (2 Kings 9:1-6,11-13). The servant spoke privately to Jehu, anointed him secretly, and then left. When Jehu came out, the others asked what that crazy man had wanted. When Jehu recounted that the servant had anointed him to be king, the others suddenly thought the servant was wonderful. From a negative circumstance, the mood changed radically.

Acts 28:7 In the same quarters were possessions of the chief man of the island, whose name was Publius; who received us, and lodged us three days courteously.

Acts 28:8 And it came to pass, that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux: to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him.

Acts 28:9 So when this was done, others also, which had diseases in the island, came, and were healed:

Acts 28:10 Who also honoured us with many honours; and when we departed, they laded us with such things as were necessary.

Paul healed the chief’s father of a “bloody flux,” which could have been a hemorrhage or dysentery. When others heard of the healing, they brought their sick to Paul to be healed. In gratitude, the inhabitants “honoured us with many honours.” Of course Paul was mostly the focus of attention, and the natives felt that providence had shipwrecked the boat for their benefit. Just as the Ethiopian eunuch regarded Philip as a messenger of God, so these barbarians considered Paul to be the same.

Comment: After the centurion and the other soldiers witnessed so many miracles, it must have saddened them to have to remand Paul over for imprisonment.

Acts 28:11 And after three months we departed in a ship of Alexandria, which had wintered in the isle, whose sign was Castor and Pollux.

Acts 28:12 And landing at Syracuse, we tarried there three days.

Paul and all of the men from the ship stayed on the isle of Melita for three months. Then they sailed on a ship from Alexandria, Egypt, and landed at Syracuse, which was on the island of Sicily. The reference to Castor and Pollux may indicate the inhabitants were given to looking at the stars, and to them, the signs may have portended that something unusual would happen.

Q: This was the second ship from Alexandria that is mentioned in the Book of Acts. Was

Alexandria a major seaport of Egypt?

A: Yes, it was a famous seaport.

Acts 28:13 And from thence we fetched a compass, and came to Rhegium: and after one day the south wind blew, and we came the next day to Puteoli:

From Syracuse, they “fetched a compass”; that is, they followed the shoreline north toward a strait, and the ship landed at Rhegium on the mainland of Italy. After one day, a favorable wind from the south helped them to go north through the strait and quickly up to Puteoli, which was just south of Rome.

Acts 28:14 Where we found brethren, and were desired to tarry with them seven days: and so we went toward Rome.

Acts 28:15 And from thence, when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appiiform, and The three taverns: whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage.

Acts 28:16 And when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard: but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him.

Acts 28:17 And it came to pass, that after three days Paul called the chief of the Jews together: and when they were come together, he said unto them, Men and brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people, or customs of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans.

Paul met brethren at Puteoli, and the centurion was amenable to Paul’s wishes, allowing him to stay there for seven days. The fact that Paul “took courage” when brethren were found shows that he had some low periods, and seeing the brethren encouraged him. The classes of brethren in Italy were not founded by Paul. Apparently, Peter’s early sermon on the Day of Pentecost had resulted in some converts there. Also, when famine and hard circumstances arose, some of the brethren from Israel may have taken up residence in Italy.

Appiiform and “The three taverns” were on the Appian Way en route to Rome. When all of them got to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard, and Paul dwelled by himself with a soldier who “kept” him. This term probably means that a soldier was chained to Paul while he was under house arrest.

After three days, Paul summoned the chief of the Jews (the leaders of the synagogue) to preach to them. He told of the circumstances that brought about his arrival in Rome as a prisoner and said that the charges against him were false. He was not an insurrectionist.

Acts 28:18 Who, when they had examined me, would have let me go, because there was no cause of death in me.

Acts 28:19 But when the Jews spake against it, I was constrained to appeal unto Caesar; not that I had aught to accuse my nation of.

Acts 28:20 For this cause therefore have I called for you, to see you, and to speak with you: because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.

Paul recognized his being in Rome was providential so that he would be a witness there of the “hope of Israel.” Because of his faithfulness to the truth, he ended up in Italy, just as the Apostle John would later be sent to the Isle of Patmos “for the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev. 1:9).

Acts 28:21 And they said unto him, We neither received letters out of Judaea concerning thee, neither any of the brethren that came showed or spake any harm of thee.

Acts 28:22 But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest: for as concerning this sect, we know that every where it is spoken against.

Acts 28:23 And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening.

Knowing that the “sect” was spoken against, the Jews “appointed him a day” for expounding and testifying of the Kingdom of God, and Paul preached to them from morning until evening. Paul repeatedly preached to the Jews who visited him while he was under house arrest (Acts 28:30,31).

Paul had a reputation as a cultist who did not believe in the Law of Moses and was eroding the faith of the Jew. In truth, however, Paul did the opposite—he *enhanced* the faith of the Jew. Even today when the truth is enlarged, some consider the thinking to be jeopardizing the truth because it is a new area. Therefore, Paul tried to show that he still had the faith of Abraham. God’s providence had now brought a different message based on *faith* rather than on the ceremonial works of the Law.

Paul was a notable prisoner, for word had spread from the passengers on the boat. In addition to the nearly 200 prisoners, there were at least another hundred people, including ship hands and passengers. Therefore, the general public, the unconsecrated, were curious about this strange passenger, and Paul took advantage of his providential experience to invite various ones to visit him.

Acts 28:24 And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not.

Acts 28:25 And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers,

Acts 28:26 Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive:

Acts 28:27 For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

At the end of his sermon, Paul quoted Isaiah 6:9,10. Some of the Jews from the synagogue believed, and some (the majority) did not.

Acts 28:28 Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.

Acts 28:29 And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves.

Paul concluded his sermon by saying that his first responsibility and desire as a Jew were to speak to his own people. However, as Isaiah had prophesied, the message was not received wholeheartedly by the Jews because of deaf ears and blind eyes, so the gospel would go to the Gentiles. Paul was saying, “If, as a people, our eyes and our ears are not open to the message

that is due at this time, God will make you jealous by turning the message to the Gentiles, among whom there will be better results.” As the Jews were leaving, they discussed the startling things that had happened: the arrival of the boat, the unusual messenger, his membership in this strange “sect,” and his sermon. Those Jews who believed would have made further contact to hear more as time went on.

Acts 28:30 And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him,

Acts 28:31 Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.

Paul remained under house arrest for two years, being blessed with *many witnessing opportunities*. He felt it was just a matter of time until he would be put in Caesar’s prison and lose these privileges. Meanwhile, he proceeded on a daily basis, not putting off his Christian armor.

The Book of Acts ends abruptly, but we know from tradition, from certain statements in the epistles to Timothy, and from writings of the early Church fathers that Paul was exonerated after the two years and that he got an audience with Caesar and some in Caesar’s household. Then tradition says he went to Spain. Paul did mention his intention to go to Spain, but we cannot prove from the Scriptures whether he actually got there (Rom. 15:24,28). At any rate, he was imprisoned and put on trial a second time in Rome for an offense of a similar nature. At that time, he asked for “the cloak” he had left at Troas with Carpus and “the books, but especially the parchments” (2 Tim. 4:13). The Book of Hebrews may have been Paul’s last treatise because his witnessing opportunities were now curtailed. That message to the Jews was the burden of his heart. He was finally executed in either AD 64 or 66. Peter and Paul both died in that time slot.

The abrupt ending of the Book of Acts indicates there was a change in Luke’s circumstance. He may have gone somewhere else before Paul’s second imprisonment.

Comment: What a marvelous character the Apostle Paul was! We can be thankful that so many details of his experiences were providentially recorded for us in Holy Writ.