

THE BOOK OF ACTS

By Mike Glover

INTRODUCTION

The Book of Acts tells us about the movement of the Gospel and Christianity from Jerusalem to Rome. The focus of the book moves from Jesus to the apostles. Although Luke hardly tells us anything about church order or organisation, the book is a historical record of the church in the first thirty years. Some call the book the Acts of the Apostles, whilst others call it the Acts of the Holy Spirit.

The Book of Acts and the Gospel of Luke belong together. Together, they record what Jesus began to do whilst He was in the flesh and continued to do in the Spirit, and so, Acts is the continuation of the Gospel of Luke.

The book makes no sense without the Gospel of Luke, and so, it was written with the Gospel of Luke in mind. Acts follows the Gospel of Luke, but they are not the same. Luke deals with the physical activity of Christ, whilst Acts deals with the spiritual activity of Christ.

The book helps us to understand connections. Paul's letter to the Philippians helps us to explain the relationship between Judaism and Christianity. It helps us to explain the position of the Gentiles with regard to the prophecy and promises, and historical links. It links the life of Jesus to places like Rome, etc.

It provides a needed setting, the background to the rest of the New Testament, and it provides the historical background and setting. The book brings the New Testament letters to life and examines the book's historicity.

In the 1900s, the book was under attack; some said that there was a conflict between Peter and Paul, and others said that Luke wasn't qualified enough to write it.

William Ramsay wrote the book called 'St Paul the Traveller and Roman Citizen,' and he thought the Book of Acts was inaccurate. So he went all out to prove the book wrong, but instead he found it to be true. He visited all the areas mentioned in Acts but came across evidence that proves the book to be accurate.

AUTHOR

Luke wrote the book, and he is writing to a Roman official named Theophilus. The opening words of the Gospel of Luke and Acts both speak of Theophilus, **Luke 1:1-3 / Acts 1:1**, which suggests that Acts and the Gospel of Luke are both written by the same person.

There are no less than fifty Greek words that are found in both the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts, which are not found anywhere else in the rest of the New Testament.

Although Luke is never mentioned by name in the book, he uses the words 'we' and 'us' in the second half of the book, **Acts 16:10**. The word 'we' implies that the person who is writing the book is there and part of the action. The 'we' and the 'us', in **Acts 16:10**, are referring to Luke and Paul.

Luke was a travelling companion of Paul; he was there in Rome with Paul, **Colossians 4:14 / Philemon 24 / 2 Timothy 4:9-12**. We also know that he was a doctor, **Colossians 4:14**, possibly Paul's personal doctor who went with him on his travels. When we read Luke's Gospel account, we can see that he had a very special interest in sick people and their diseases, **Luke 4:38-39 / Luke 5:12 / Luke 6:6**.

When Jesus was talking about a camel passing through the eye of a needle, it is interesting because when Matthew and Mark write about it, they use a Greek word which means a ‘household needle’, Matthew 19:24 / Mark 10:25, but when Luke records this event, he uses the Greek word for a ‘surgeon’s needle,’ Luke 18:25.

DATE

Paul is in prison around A.D. 61-63, and the book ends with Paul in prison, so the book was finished around A.D. 63. The book tells us nothing about what happens to Paul after his release, but we do know that he was executed around A.D. 67-68.

THEME

When we read through the book, we see God’s continued desire to have fellowship with mankind. We read about the preaching of Christ and the power of the Word when it is being preached. We also read about the growth of the community of believers, and we see progress despite opposition.

We read about the inclusion of the Gentiles and the daily life of the community of believers. The biggest theme is the continued work of Christ in and through His people; they are all interwoven with each other.

OUTLINE

The arrival of the Spirit. Acts 1-2
 Early days in Jerusalem. Acts 3-5
 Beyond Jerusalem. Acts 6-9
 Enter the Gentiles. Acts 10-12
 The Asia Minor mission and its consequences. Acts 13-15
 The Macedonian and Grecian mission. Acts 16-18
 Back to Asia. Acts 19-20
 The missionaries’ arrest and imprisonment. Acts 21-28

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.” Acts 1:1-3

Luke begins by saying, ‘in my former book’, in other words, he’s going to get our minds focused back to his Gospel account of Jesus Christ. When reading any letter, we not only need to understand who wrote it, but we also need to understand to whom it was written.

WHO IS THEOPHILUS?

His name means ‘one who loves God,’ but when Luke writes his gospel, he addresses him in [Luke 1:3](#) as ‘most excellent Theophilus.’ Theophilus is obviously a follower of Jesus, and he possibly helped Luke with finances. When we look at other people in the Bible with the title ‘most excellent’, they are usually people who are a part of the Roman government.

In [Acts 23](#), when the Jews were planning and plotting to kill Paul. Paul’s sister’s son heard about it and told Paul. Paul then told one of the centurions, who then went and told his commanding officer.

Felix was a Roman governor, [Acts 23:26](#), and Luke addresses the Roman governor Felix as ‘most excellent,’ in [Acts 24:3](#). When the apostle Paul was standing in front of Festus, giving his testimony, Paul addresses Festus and calls him ‘most excellent Festus,’ [Acts 26:25](#).

WAS THEOPHILUS A ROMAN GOVERNOR?

We simply don’t know, but because Luke addresses him as ‘most excellent’, he certainly has a position of high ranking of some sort. The beloved physician, as Paul describes him, [Colossians 4:14](#), seems to have thought of Acts as a continuation of his account of the works and words of Jesus Christ.

In a very real sense, the works of the church could be described as the works of Christ. But the point is this, Luke wrote the letter of Acts because it gives his readers an overview of the workings of Jesus for the thirty years following His resurrection.

In other words, the Book of Acts lets us see the fulfilment of Jesus’ coming in the first place, [Luke 19:10](#). And what we discover as we go through this letter of Luke is a detailed and pictured account of that happening. We can’t read through the Book of Acts and not see Jesus saving people; we can’t miss seeing people choosing to remain lost in their sins.

On the Day of Pentecost, for example, we read that Jesus saved three thousand souls from their sins, [Acts 2:41](#).

In [Acts 2:47](#), we read about ‘even more’ souls being saved by Jesus. But these figures also tell us that ‘many more’ people decided to remain dead in their sins.

Some commentators have estimated between 1 and 2 million souls were present on that day, but we just don’t know for sure. We do know there would have been many, many, many more souls who rejected Peter’s message and chose to remain dead in their sins, [Ephesians 2:1-5](#).

Five thousand souls were added to the Lord’s church later, [Acts 4:1-4](#), but how many chose to remain in their sins?

We just don’t know. But the point I’m trying to make is that the Book of Acts not only shows us many people choosing to reject the Gospel and so remain in their sins, but the book also shows us many people responding in humble obedience to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. What we see is a picture of Jesus seeking and saving the lost through the Holy Spirit’s working through the apostles.

Luke begins by telling us about the things which Jesus ‘done’ first, and then he mentions the things that Jesus ‘said’, [Acts 1:1](#). This is significant to me that he would mention ‘actions’ first, and then ‘words’.

Unlike those of us who sin, Jesus’ actions were consistent with His preaching, [1 Peter 2:21-22](#), but not only were they consistent with His preaching, they underlined His teachings.

In other words, Jesus practised what He preached; His actions and His words were completed on the day He ascended into the heavens to be seated on the right hand of the Father, [Mark 16:19-20](#) / [Luke 24:50-53](#) / [Acts 1:6-12](#). And so, what Luke is doing here, following the resurrection of Jesus Christ, is setting the stage for the rest of the book, [Acts 1:1-2](#).

The point is this: we cannot truly understand the Book of Acts until we truly understand just exactly who Jesus Christ is. Because many people do not believe that Jesus Christ did exist.

But even more importantly, some people, who do believe He existed, don’t truly understand just exactly who He was. Jesus Christ was God in the flesh, [John 1:1-4](#) / [John 1:14](#). He was there at the beginning of creation, [Genesis 1:26](#). I think this is important for us all to understand because when Luke refers to our Lord Jesus Christ, he’s referring to the same Lord Jesus Christ who was there at the very start of all things.

Seventy-four times the Name Jesus is found throughout the book. The Name Christ is mentioned twenty-four times throughout the book. One hundred and two times the Name Lord, in reference to Jesus Christ, is mentioned throughout the book.

I’m no Biblical scholar, but if our Lord Jesus Christ is Luke’s favourite topic, then we need to ask the question, why? If we know that Jesus was there in the beginning and we know He became human and walked among us, we also need to understand that He is going to be the One who will meet us when we die, [2 Corinthians 5:8](#) / [Hebrews 9:27](#). There’s a time coming when everyone on this planet, past and present, every demon in hell is going to realise that Jesus Christ was there in the beginning and Jesus Christ was God in the flesh who walked among us, [John 1:1-4](#) / [John 1:14](#) / [Philippians 2:9-11](#).

It’s not a question of ‘if’, it’s a question of ‘when.’ Jesus Christ is coming back, [Acts 1:11](#), and a day has been set when Jesus will return, and He will judge us everyone past and present, [Acts 17:29-31](#).

Luke also tells us that Jesus gave His disciples instructions through the Holy Spirit, [Acts 1:2](#). The apostles were the ones who received those instructions from Christ. But why the apostles, why these guys? It’s certainly not because they were more intelligent than anyone else; it wasn’t because they were stronger in the faith or better in debate than anyone else.

Not even because they had seen Him alive after His death and burial, because a lot of people saw Jesus alive after His resurrection, [Acts 1:3](#). Hundreds of witnesses saw Jesus after His resurrection, [1 Corinthians 15:1-8](#).

The reason Jesus chose these guys was that they had spent a lot of time with Jesus while His work was being done here on earth. Jesus was teaching them the truth concerning His kingdom, [Acts 1:3](#). For forty days, the resurrected King taught His chosen apostles important truths concerning the kingdom of God, [Acts 1:3](#).

In other words, He was teaching them about the church, [Matthew 16:18](#). From the time leading up to Jesus’ death, to the time of Jesus’ ascension, He spoke to His apostles through the promised Holy Spirit, [Acts 1:4](#) / [John 16:12-13](#). And so, in the truest sense, we can honestly see in the Book of Acts, the acts of Jesus Christ as seen in the workings of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the apostles.

“On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” Acts 1:4-5

KEEPING HIS APPOINTMENT

It's a sad truth that within many of our congregations, we always have those who are late; they're late for worship, late for Bible study, and late for any event that the church has planned. They're never late for work or family events, which does beg the question of priorities.

As Coffman in his commentary rightly suggests, Christ made an appointment to meet His disciples in Galilee, and that appointment He kept. He kept it in spite of:

1. His sleeping disciples. 2. His betrayal. 3. Their forsaking Him. 4. His death. 5. His burial. 6. Peter's denial. 7. The big lie. 8. The unbelief of many.

The only people who didn't meet Christ on that mount in Galilee are those who didn't go there to keep their appointment.

Coffman goes on to say, in like manner, now Christ keeps His appointments with His disciples, in spite of similar lapses on their part, and what are those appointments? They are:

1. To meet him in baptism. 2. At the Lord's table. 3. In the trials of life. 4. In death. 5. In the judgment to come.

Only those who will not obey Him shall miss the joy of meeting the Lord in those appointments, but in the case of the judgment, all shall keep that appointment, whether they desire to do so or not.

The time for excuses is over. If Christ can keep His appointment after enduring everything He went through, then surely, we can keep our appointments and come together at the appointed time to worship Him and study His Word!

Luke now focuses on the days following Jesus' resurrection, and we know that Jesus appeared to His apostles on several different occasions. Luke records four convincing proofs in His Gospel.

1. On the road to Emmaus, [Luke 24:13-35](#). 2. Eating with them, [Luke 24:36-49](#). 3. He appeared in their midst, [John 20:19](#). 4. Eating fish with them, [John 21:1-13](#).

We know Jesus did eat with his disciples following the resurrection because Luke tells us in his Gospel, [Luke 24:36-43](#). Jesus eating with His disciples isn't the point here; the point Luke is making is that Jesus never promises something He never intends to fulfil.

Luke's point is that Jesus instructed His disciples to remain in Jerusalem until the Father's promise, about which he had told them, came to fulfilment, [Acts 1:4](#) / [Luke 24:49-53](#).

WHAT WAS THAT PROMISE?

The promise is the coming of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, or Helper, [John 14:15-18](#). Remember all the apostles had been baptised by John in water at their repentance, [Mark 1:4](#), but Jesus told them that the time was coming when they would be baptised with the Holy Spirit, [Acts 1:5](#) / [Luke 3:16](#).

We won't go into too much detail about being baptised with the Holy Spirit at this point in our study, but we will note, in [Acts 2:1-4](#), we find the fulfilment of that promise of Jesus. We see the apostles being baptised with the Holy Spirit.

“So when they met together, they asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive

power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Acts 1:6-8

Whenever people talked about God’s kingdom to God’s people, they would have a different idea from what God had in mind. A way back in the days of Daniel, God prophesied through him that a kingdom would come, [Daniel 2:44](#). The apostles, like many Jews, thought that Jesus was going to establish a physical kingdom here on earth. They believed it would be an earthly kingdom that would conquer all of its enemies.

And they were itching to know when this great earthly kingdom was going to be established. Time and time again, Jesus had to tell people that His kingdom was not an earthly kingdom but a spiritual kingdom, [John 18:36](#). The disciples wanted to get on with God’s work, and one of the biggest lessons we can learn as Christians is that we are working on God’s timetable, not ours, [Ecclesiastes 3:1-8](#). The disciples had to learn patience concerning the arrival of God’s kingdom, [Acts 1:6-7](#).

But at the same time, it was also important for them to know and understand what Jesus promised them. They were to receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them, which was going to happen in God’s time, not theirs, [Acts 1:8](#) / [Luke 24:49](#).

Because it was only when the Holy Spirit came that they could get on with the work that God had planned for them to do. They were to be patient, but notice also Jesus doesn’t leave them in the dark about what is going to happen to them. He tells them what they have to do when the Spirit arrives, [Acts 1:8](#).

Jesus says, stay in Jerusalem until you receive power from on high, but once you have that power, I want you to tell people all over Jerusalem about me, go to Judea and go to Samaria, and finally, I want the Gospel to go all over the world, [Acts 1:8](#).

The disciples should already be aware of what was going to happen. Time and time again, Jesus spoke to them about things that were about to happen, and they were fulfilled, and Jesus ascending into heaven is one of those predictions.

THE ACCENSION OF JESUS

“After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.” Acts 1:9-11

Note that [Acts 1:9](#) is the fulfilment of the Lord’s own prediction when He asked His disciples, ‘What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before!’ [John 6:62](#).

And so, having issued these final instructions, Jesus began to bless the apostles, [Luke 24:50-51](#), and then at that moment, Jesus was taken up into a cloud. Before Jesus came to earth, He was with the Father in Heaven, but the apostles saw Him begin His ascent back to the throne, [John 16:28](#). His new resurrected body was raised up into heaven so that He could assume His authority, [Daniel 7:13-14](#) / [Ephesians 1:20-22](#) / [Philippians 2:9-11](#).

Jesus is now at the right hand of God as King of kings and Lord of lords, [1 Timothy 6:15](#) / [Revelation 17:14](#) / [Revelation 19:16](#). He is now reigning over all things, [Ephesians 1:22-23](#) / [1 Peter 3:22](#). And He will continue to reign until the last enemy, death, has been conquered, [1 Corinthians 15:24-28](#).

Notice that Jesus was taken up ‘before their very eyes,’ [Acts 1:9](#). Why? Simply because they had to witness this to further establish their faith in Christ, and when they were sharing the Gospel, they could tell people that what they had witnessed was real and not some made-up story.

We must remember there had been at least ten appearances of Jesus to His disciples after His resurrection, but this was to be an event they would never forget in a hurry.

Luke tells us that a cloud hid Jesus from the disciples' sight, [Acts 1:9](#) / [Daniel 7:13-14](#) / [Psalm 68:18](#) / [Psalm 110:1](#) / [Mark 16:19](#) / [Luke 23:43](#) / [John 20:17](#) / [Hebrews 4:14](#) / [Hebrews 9:24](#) / [1 Peter 3:22](#).

When we think about it, there were clouds involved in His transfiguration, [Matthew 17:5](#), Jesus speaks about His coming 'in the clouds of heaven', [Mark 14:62](#), and when we read the Old Testament, we read about a cloud being visible to let the Israelites know that the glory of God was present at the tent of meeting, [Exodus 40:34](#).

Can you imagine being there when Jesus was taken up into heaven? We can almost imagine the apostles standing there with their mouths wide open, looking up into the clouds where they had last seen the Saviour. What a sight that must have been.

But while they were looking, Luke tells us that two men in white clothing stood by and told them Jesus would come again in the same way they had seen him go, [Acts 1:10](#). Who are these two men?

I believe it is very likely the two 'men' who Luke says stood by the apostles are angels who appeared in the form of men, [Matthew 28:2-4](#) / [Mark 16:5](#) / [Luke 24:4](#) / [John 20:10-12](#).

THE QUESTION

The angels ask the disciples, 'Why do you stand here looking into the sky?' [Acts 1:10-11](#). To me, this is one of the most unfair questions we find in the Scriptures. Think about it, if you were there and witnessed someone ascending into the heavens, wouldn't you be amazed and just stand there looking up?

Notice that the angels tell them that 'this same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven,' [Acts 1:10-11](#).

If this doesn't tell us about how He will return, I don't know what will. There's no secret or invisible return of Christ mentioned here or anywhere in the Scriptures. He left in the clouds, and He will return in the clouds, [2 Thessalonians 1:7-9](#).

The words, 'coming in the clouds', are simply judgment talk which speaks of God coming in judgement on people or a nation, [Matthew 24:30](#) / [1 Thessalonians 4:17](#) / [Revelation 1:7](#). The reasons the angels asked the question weren't to rebuke them but to remind them that there are more important things to be getting on with.

Specifically, they had to get on with the great commission, [Matthew 28:19-20](#) / [Mark 16:15](#), and wait on the promised Holy Spirit from the Father to come upon them with power, [Luke 24:49](#) / [Acts 1:8](#).

Notice that the disciples worshipped Him, [Luke 24:52-53](#). This would simply be the natural response to witnesses who saw the Lord going up into heaven. If they didn't believe He was the Messiah, the Christ, if they didn't believe He was Deity, up to this point, they certainly would have after witnessing His ascension.

Why did they return to Jerusalem? Simply because this is what Jesus commanded them to do, [Luke 24:49](#) / [Acts 1:4](#), He commanded them to stay in Jerusalem until they had received the promise, the Holy Spirit with power, [Acts 1:5](#). Although Jesus brought an end to all the temple ceremonies and traditions, the disciples went back to the temple to praise God, [Luke 24:52](#). Why? Possibly out of habit or possibly because that's where a great number of people would be gathered, and this could be an opportunity to share the Gospel with others. Remember, the temple is still standing at this point and wouldn't be destroyed until 70 A.D.

CONCLUSION

When we read the account of Jesus' ascension, we read it as if it were a common, everyday event. I can imagine the disciples being a little frightened, whilst being in complete awe as they witness their Master being raised into the sky. This would have been incredible to see, and I'm sure we would speak about it all the days of our lives, to anyone who would listen.

When Jesus returns, it will be personal, [1 Thessalonians 4:16](#); it will be visible, [1 John 3:2](#); it will be audible, [1 Thessalonians 4:16](#) / [1 Corinthians 15:22](#); it will be communal, [1 Thessalonians 4:14](#) / [Matthew 16:27](#) / [2 Thessalonians 1:6-7](#), it will be final, [2 Thessalonians 1:7-10](#).

The question we all need to ask ourselves, whether we're Christians or not, is simply this: Are we ready for His return? [Matthew 25:1-13](#).

MATTHIAS CHOSEN TO REPLACE JUDAS

“Then they returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city. When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James, son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas, son of James. They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.” Acts 1:12-14

Those who had seen Jesus ascend went into the city of Jerusalem and assembled in an upper room, [Acts 1:12-13](#), so now there is a time of waiting, but it wasn't a sorrowful time; it was a time of joy, [Luke 24:52-53](#).

This tells me that the time of sorrow following the crucifixion of Jesus was over, and now the apostles realised the events they had witnessed were a reason for rejoicing, [Psalm 30:5](#).

Notice there were women there, Mary, Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus' brothers, Joseph, James, Jude and Simon, [Acts 1:13-14](#) [Matthew 13:55](#). This is the last mention of Mary. We know that Jesus' brothers didn't believe Him at first, [John 7:5](#), but after the ascension, they do.

What do we do while we wait for God's timetable to begin? We do what these eleven did, we do what Mary, the Lord's mother, did. We do what Jesus' half-brothers did, we do what these other unidentified disciples were constantly found doing.

We wait patiently and prepare with prayer, [Acts 1:14](#). These guys prepared themselves for what was about to happen with prayer as they awaited the promise of the Holy Spirit.

“In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty) and said, “Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus- he was one of our number and shared in this ministry.” (With the reward he got for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open, and all his intestines spilled out. Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this, so they called that field in their language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)” Acts 1:15-19

Sometime during that period of waiting, Peter addressed a group of about one hundred and twenty disciples to find a replacement for Judas. If we ever wondered why Judas had to be replaced, I believe it's simply because Judas had been numbered with them and had a part in the ministry the Lord had given to the apostles.

During the days of Jesus, if anyone mentioned the place, Akeldama, 'Field of Blood' and the name 'Judas Iscariot,' people would know exactly who and what you were talking about. Remember, after realising what he had done, Judas threw the thirty pieces of silver down in the temple, and went out and hanged himself, Matthew 27:3-5.

The chief priests didn't feel blood money should be placed in the treasury, so they purchased a field in which to bury strangers, as Matthew tells us, Zechariah 11:13 / Matthew 27:10.

According to Luke, we can conclude that either the branch he used to hang himself on or the rope itself broke, and Judas' body fell and burst open, Acts 1:18.

In the heat of the day, his gases built up within him, and he fell or was cut down, and when he landed, he burst open. Everyone in Jerusalem knew about this event.

Everybody in that group whom Peter addresses would have been acquainted with the facts surrounding Judas' death and the purchase of the Akeldama, 'Field of Blood'.

"For," said Peter, "it is written in the book of Psalms, "May his place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in it," and "May another take his place of leadership.' Therefore, it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection. They proposed two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias." Acts 1:20-23

Quoting from Psalms 69:25 and Psalms 109:8, Peter told those who were gathered that the Holy Spirit, through David, had said the surroundings of Judas would become desolate, and another would be chosen to take his office. God knew that Judas was going to do it.

To choose someone to take Judas' place, they couldn't just choose their best friend or someone who appeared to be spiritually mature. They had to meet a certain criterion.

Whoever they were going to choose had to have been with the Lord from the time that John baptised Jesus, right up to the ascension of Jesus, but they would especially need to have witnessed the resurrection of Jesus, Acts 1:21-22. Peter sets out the physical requirements for who is going to replace Judas, but ultimately it is God who knows best, 2 Chronicles 6:30. Joseph called Barsabbas, also known as Justus, and Matthias are nominated, Acts 1:23.

"Then they prayed, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs." Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles". Acts 1:24-26

They addressed a prayer to the One who knows people's hearts better than any of us. When we are faced with tough decisions in life, God needs to be our first protocol, Acts 6:6 / Acts 13:3 / Acts 14:23. Because when we pray for God to help us with any decision in life, we are doing two things.

1. We are inviting God to look into our hearts and the hearts of others we are praying for because we know that He knows everyone's hearts better than we do, Psalms 44:21 / Jeremiah 17:10.

2. When we pray, we are expressing complete dependence upon God to help us make the right decision for us, Nehemiah 6:15-16 / Proverbs 3:5 / Isaiah 41:13 / James 4:15.

And that's what these guys were doing in the upper room. They were acknowledging their own inability to see into the inward thoughts of others, and they were expressing complete dependence upon God for making a correct decision. They asked that the Ruler of the universe guide the selection process so that the right man would be chosen, Acts 1:24-25. Notice they cast lots.

Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

‘David divided the priests by lot, 1 Chronicles 24:5. The land of Canaan was divided by lot, Numbers 26:55 / Joshua 15:0 / Joshua 16:1-10 / Joshua 17:0, etc. Jonathan, son of Saul, was detected as having violated his father’s command and as bringing calamity on the Israelites by lot, 1 Samuel 14:41-42. Achan was detected by lot, Joshua 7:16-18.’ We don’t really know or understand how the casting of lots actually worked, just as we don’t really know or understand how the Urim and the Thummim actually worked, Ezra 2:63 / Nehemiah 7:65. Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The word ‘lots,’ is not used to express votes or suffrage. The expression ‘the lot fell upon’ is not consistent with the notion of voting. It is commonly expressive of casting lots. Casting lots was common among the Jews on important and difficult occasions, and it was natural that the apostles should resort to it in this.’

The lot fell on Matthias, Acts 1:26 / Proverbs 16:33. God chose Matthias to do His work here on earth, as He chose you and me to do His work here on earth, 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14.

And so the stage is set, God’s timetable is about to come upon them. Jesus’ spiritual kingdom is about to come, and it is going to be established, and His promise to His disciples of the Holy Spirit is about to be fulfilled.

CHAPTER 2

INTRODUCTION

“When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly, a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.” Acts 2:1-4

THE HOLY SPIRIT COMES AT PENTECOST

Remember, Luke is writing to inform us of the continuing work of Jesus Christ through His apostles. We know the Jews celebrated many feasts, and the feasts and festivals of the Jewish nation were scheduled at specific times in the annual calendar, and they were both civil and religious in nature.

Some marked the beginning or the end of the agricultural year, while others commemorated historic events in the life of the nation. All of the feasts were marked by thanksgiving and joyous feasting, but all feasts and festivals were a reminder for all the people of Israel to worship the Lord and give thanks to Him for what He had done for them as a nation.

The very first feast of the Jewish year was Passover, Exodus 12:1-2. The Passover was a celebration; it was to remind them of how God delivered them from the hands of Egyptian slavery, Exodus 13:1-4.

The second feast followed fifty days later, and in the New Testament, it is called Pentecost. We see that’s the time they were all together in one place, Acts 2:1. To the Jew, whenever you mention Pentecost, they would know the exact date for this feast, Acts 20:16.

But the feast of Pentecost also had other names in the Old Testament; it's called 'feasts of weeks,' Exodus 34:22 / Deuteronomy 16:10. The Old Testament also calls it the 'feast of harvest,' Exodus 23:16, and finally it is referred to as the 'day of first fruits,' Numbers 28:26.

When all the wheat and barley had been cut and gathered, God said back in Deuteronomy 16 where they were to celebrate. The people were expected to assemble at the place of the altar and hold their celebration there, Deuteronomy 16:11.

Pentecost was a happy celebration of God's great provision. Freewill offerings were made with a special emphasis placed upon doing good for the Levites, strangers, orphans and widows, Deuteronomy 16:10-14.

The point is that Pentecost was a time to rejoice in all the things that God had blessed His people with. It was a time of giving, but on this occasion, as we are going to see, God was going to give something else.

John the baptiser foretold that Jesus would baptise His apostles with the Holy Spirit, John 1:33-34. In other words, no mere apostle could baptise someone with the Holy Spirit; it had to be the Son of God.

Jesus also promised that 'they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them', Luke 24:49. Just before Jesus' ascension to the throne in heaven, He told His apostles they would be baptised with the Holy Spirit, Acts 1:4-5. I just need to mention a really important point here. In contrast to the baptism of the great commission recorded in Matthew 28:19-20, which was a command, the baptism of the Holy Spirit was a promise. The apostles were promised the baptism of the Holy Spirit, not everyone who was in Jerusalem, Acts 1:8.

And who are the 'you' mentioned there in Acts 2:8? Sometimes in our Bible, when the word 'you' is mentioned, it's used in the plural sense, meaning more than one person. And if we read back in Acts 1:2, we will conclude that Luke has to be referring to the apostles.

We also know that the 'they' of Acts 2:1 refers to the apostles because Acts 1:26 tells us that 'they cast lots', and tells us that Matthias was numbered with the eleven. This promise of the baptism of the Holy Spirit given by Jesus was given to the apostles.

When we take the time to read the relevant Scriptures carefully, we read that Jesus promised the apostles that 'THEY' would receive power from on high, when the Holy Spirit comes upon 'THEM', John 14:26 / John 16:13 / Luke 24:49 / Acts 1:4-5.

When we take a moment to understand the contrast between Holy Spirit baptism and water baptism, it's clear that the promise was a promise for the apostles only, which means the one hundred and twenty didn't receive the Holy Spirit simply because, like Christians today, they had never been given such a promise by Jesus.

It's a mistake of major proportions, both textually and contextually, to assign any of these promises to ALL disciples, John 14:26 / John 16:13 / Luke 24:49 / Acts 1:4-5. When we read carefully, we will see that only the apostles were addressed. And it was only the apostles who received the fulfilment of the promise.

There's a huge difference between a promise and a command, and today, sinners receive the Holy Spirit when they are obedient to the Gospel, at their baptism, Acts 2:38 / Acts 5:32.

Why was it just given to those guys and no one else? In what way was the Holy Spirit going to help them? We need to ask ourselves what role the Holy Spirit played.

The Holy Spirit played a significant role in the fulfilment of the command to go into all the world, Matthew 28:19-20. Throughout the history of the Bible, we see people forgetting who God is, and so, God has to remind His people about who He is, Genesis 26:24 / Exodus 3:6 / Exodus 20:2. And that theme runs right throughout the Old Testament. We all have bad memories sometimes, and we often forget what God has done for each of us. That's why when Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, He said, 'do this in remembrance of me,' Luke 22:19 / 1 Corinthians 11:24-25.

In a very similar sense, the Holy Spirit was given to the apostles to remind them about Jesus, John 14:26. So the Spirit's role was to counsel them, teach them all things and remind them of everything Jesus said.

Now did that time come? Is there any evidence that Jesus' promise came true? Well, yes, there is. The first physical evidence that the promise had come was a 'sound like' a rushing, mighty wind which filled the house in which the apostles were sitting, **Acts 2:2**.

And the second piece of evidence was divided tongues, which 'looked like' fire appeared to them and sat on each of them, **Acts 2:3**. And finally, the third piece of evidence was that each spoke in a language he had never studied, **Acts 2:4**. It was in these ways that the Holy Spirit's presence was made known.

Let me say something really important here about the first two pieces of evidence. When writers in the Bible are trying to explain something which is almost unexplainable, they use words to help us understand what's happening.

Notice Luke doesn't say there was a rushing wind or actual fire on the apostle's head, he says it 'sounds like', **Acts 2:2**, and 'looks like', **Acts 2:3**. Books like Ezekiel, Daniel and Revelation, just to name a few, are filled with language like this. When Ezekiel is trying to explain his vision from God, he says it 'looked like' glowing metal, it wasn't literally glowing metal, **Ezekiel 1:4-5**.

When Daniel is describing his vision, he says it 'looked like' a bear and another 'looked like' a leopard, it wasn't literally a bear and a leopard he saw, **Daniel 7:5-6**. When John is describing his vision, he says, it 'looked like' a sea of glass mixed with fire, **Revelation 15:1-2**.

All these writers are trying their hardest to use human illustrations to describe their heavenly visions. But the point is that Luke wasn't literally talking about a violent wind; he wasn't literally talking about tongues of fire.

He doesn't know and fully understands what's happening, and he's trying his best to describe the events which are unfolding using the only language he knows, human language.

Anyone who claims that they have received Holy Spirit baptism in the way these apostles did today needs to seriously rethink what they are saying. The promise of the Holy Spirit baptism was for the apostles. I know that what happened to Cornelius's household, **Acts 10**, is similar, but we will deal with that when we get there.

But for the moment, I want us to look at how the audience reacted to the Spirit's arrival. Remember that Moses instructed that all males be present for the feast of Pentecost, so it is no surprise to us when Luke tells us next.

“Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. “When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. Utterly amazed, they asked: “Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” **Acts 2:5-11**

The coming of the Holy Spirit was effectively confirmed by the witnesses who came together because of the sound like a rushing, mighty wind, **Acts 2:4**. Now, not only did the apostles hear and see something, but so did the audience. The audience heard every man speak in the language in which he was born, **Acts 2:5-6**.

Some religious groups claim that when the Spirit comes upon you, you have to go and tell someone about it. The audience did not have to be told something unusual was happening. The apostles did not have to tell everyone that they had received, or gotten, as some say, the Spirit.

Those from the fifteen nations mentioned by Luke heard them speaking 'in their own tongues', or languages, **Acts 2:7-8**. They also saw what Christ poured out. Their surprise at what they heard and saw moved them to seek some possible explanations.

Just like Luke struggled to describe what happened, those who witnessed the apostles speaking in different languages couldn't understand what was happening either.

The evidence of tongue-speaking was one thing, but the real miraculous gift about speaking in tongues is the fact that those who could speak in many different languages had never studied or even been taught these languages in their lives.

Tongue speaking, as some claim today, is not some gobble gook language that no one can understand. Tongue-speaking was the known language that was spoken in the known world at that time.

When we get to **Acts 10** and Cornelius' household, we look into the purpose of the supernatural gift of tongues in more detail. But for now, let me say this: the gift of tongues served its purpose beginning in **Acts 2**, right up until the final person who was given this gift died in the early years of the church.

We have no reason to believe, and there is no Biblical evidence to support that this gift would still be used and needed today, as it has served its purpose. The Scriptures teach that the gift of 'tongues' was to cease, **1 Corinthians 13:4-8**. In other words, the gifts of supernatural prophecy, supernatural tongues and supernatural knowledge were never intended to last forever.

With the completion of apostolic testimony and the completion of the Scriptures of truth, the complete written revelation of God in the form of the Book we call the Bible and what Jude describes as 'the faith', is now complete, **Jude 3**.

There is no need for these gifts today because God hasn't got any more revelations to share with us. He has revealed all of His will in His Word, **Hebrews 1:1-3 / 2 Peter 1:3**.

Something else which is interesting about those who profess to speak in tongues today reveals a sad inconsistency. Did you know that there are schools you can attend to learn to speak in tongues?

Some groups in their mission training schools must teach their missionaries to speak in the 'tongues' of those nations they seek to evangelise. And when you think about it, this practice demolishes their contention of having the miraculous gift of tongues, such as that displayed on the day of Pentecost. If they have the gift of tongues, why would they need to be taught?

Luke carries on and tells us that there were many people around, and he lists at least fifteen separate nations represented on the day of Pentecost, **Acts 2:9-11**.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'The list of geographical names shows the diversity of the people to whom the apostles spoke, the provinces and locations mentioned lying in all directions from Jerusalem and representing a cross-section of the languages spoken in the entire Roman Empire.'

PETER ADDRESSES THE CROWD

"Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?" Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine. Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel."
Acts 2:12-16

Notice how the audience reacted; some people merely wondered at the meaning of the occurrences, while others said the apostles were drunk, **Acts 2:12-13**. No Jew would drink any alcohol at that time of the morning, **Acts 2:15**. Imagine being there and witnessing this, imagine the local paparazzi. Imagine the local newspaper, the 'Jerusalem Times', has on its front page, 'apostles' drunken house party literally shakes the house.'

We can imagine, on the front page of the ‘Temple News’ newspaper, ‘alcohol fuelled apostles speak languages they’ve never learned or studied before’. Imagine the guy at the newspaper stand at the temple gates shouting, ‘Read all about it! Read all about it! The drunk apostles claim that God’s kingdom has come!’

Peter, in his sermon, tells us why these things happened, and he basically says, do you want proof that Jesus was who He said He was? Do you want proof that this is from God? Do you remember the prophet, Joel? Do you want proof that God keeps His promises?

Peter says what the audience saw and heard on Pentecost was proof that the promise of the Holy Spirit really had come, and the apostles were witnesses to the fact, **Acts 2:33**. Luke did what every faithful Christian should do, and that’s to point people back to Jesus, **Acts 4:12**.

“In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Acts 2:17-21

Peter plainly says the pouring out of the Spirit upon the apostles was the fulfilment of the prophecy of Joel, **Joel 2:28-32**. If the Jews were wondering when Joel’s prophecy was going to be fulfilled, this was it. If the Jews were looking for proof that they were now living in the Last Days, this was it.

THE LAST DAYS

There is so much going on in the ‘religious world’ concerning the last days. People are looking for signs and wonders to prove we’re in the last days, there are wars, and there are terrors that all point to the end of the world. I wonder what the Bible actually teaches concerning ‘the last days’. I think you’ll find it fairly straightforward.

Notice how the Hebrew writer begins, **Hebrews 1:1-2**; he writes as a matter of fact. There’s no doubt or question about the existence of God; he simply says, ‘in the past God’.

We find a similar style of writing in **Genesis 1:1** and **John 1:1**. And notice again that there’s no doubt or question about the existence of God in these authors’ minds. In other words, the Bible never sets out to argue for the existence of God; it’s taken as a matter of fact that God is, God exists.

And because the writer says, ‘at many times and in various ways’, **Hebrews 1:1-2**, this actually implies that God had more to say. In other words, each prophet didn’t carry the final message. The whole truth wasn’t out yet, God’s revelation wasn’t complete yet.

We know that God first spoke directly to the patriarchs, and then God spoke through the written law. Then God spoke in dreams and visions, and God also spoke through the prophets. But God wasn’t done revealing His word yet.

And I use the word ‘but’ because that’s the word the writer of this letter uses. And he uses that word to emphasise the contrast between how God spoke and revealed His Word to mankind in the past and how He revealed His complete and final revelation in Jesus. He says, ‘but in these last days’, **Hebrews 1:1-2**, which is obviously a Messianic reference.

Now, there are times when I get a knock at the door, and there are usually two very polite religious people telling me how bad the world is today and how Jesus is coming soon because we are living in the last days.

They bring to my attention all the wars and famines which are happening throughout the world and try to convince me that these are all ‘signs’ that we’re living in the last days.

But the truth is, we’ve been living in the last days ever since the arrival of Jesus. The last days are the days of the Messiah, not the end of the world. Several centuries before the birth of Christ, the prophet Joel in **Joel 2:28-29** foretold that the Spirit of God would be ‘poured out’ in the ‘last days’.

When Peter preached the first Gospel message to the Jews in **Acts 2**, he says, ‘And in the last days it will be,’ etc, **Acts 2:17**. Peter quotes from **Joel 2**, and notice how he describes the days in which they were living at that point in time. He describes them at ‘that point in time’ as living in ‘the last days’, **Acts 2:17**.

Countless sermons have been preached, and thousands of books have been sold, which all try to tell us that certain things are happening in the world today, and they tell us these are all ‘signs’ that Jesus is about to return. And so, they go out on the streets preaching, and they have these posters which say, ‘The end is near, we’re in the last days.’

People have been proclaiming the end of the world since 66 A.D. Simon bar Giora, who was a member of a Jewish sect, was the first to predict the end of the world. The Jehovah’s Witnesses have tried to predict the end of the world at least three times.

Most recently, Harold Camping tried to predict the end of the world twice. And did you know that there are around thirteen different new predictions for the end of the world coming up in the next few years?

All of these predictions, past and present, have claimed the signs are there to warn us we’re living in the last days. Well, of course, we’re in the last days, and we’ve been there for the last two thousand years.

Look at what Paul wrote to his young friend Timothy, ‘There will be terrible times in the last days’, **2 Timothy 3:1**. And then Paul lists a whole bunch of non-Christian-like attitudes, but look at what he tells Timothy later, ‘Have nothing to do with such people,’ **2 Timothy 3:5**. This is present tense and has nothing to do with those people who were around at that time. That in itself tells us that Timothy was living in ‘the last days’.

When Peter is talking about the Christ, he says, ‘He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake’, **1 Peter 1:20**. Was Jesus around during the time of the Apostle Peter? Of course, He was. Peter understood he was living in the last times.

Jesus uses a similar kind of language in **Matthew 24:1-35**. Now, remember the disciples have come to Jesus privately to ask Him ‘what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?’

And so, Jesus is answering their questions. Let me give you an example of how Jesus answers them. Jesus says, ‘How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers!’ **Matthew 24:19**.

He uses the words ‘those days’ throughout this text when He’s describing the destruction of Jerusalem. But when we carry on reading from **Matthew 24:36** through to **Matthew 26:46**, He uses the words ‘that day’ to describe what will happen at the end of the world, **Matthew 24:36**.

Do you see how His words are more specific? Now, if we were studying the topic of ‘the end of the world’, that’s one of the texts we would go to. But we’re not studying that today, we’re studying the topic of ‘the last days’, which isn’t something still to come.

‘The last days’ were then, as the prophets looked forward to the time by speaking of ‘in those days and at that time.’ If the world continues for another thousand years, we would still be in the last days. And so, God formerly spoke through the prophets at many times and in many ways, but in these ‘last days’, He has spoken to us by His Son. **Hebrews 1:1-2**.

We need to remember that not all of Joel's prophecy was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost; some of his words would be fulfilled a little later. For example, when Joel says, 'God will pour out His Spirit on all people' or 'all flesh', Joel 2:28 / Acts 2:17, as some translations have it, he was talking about the Gentiles.

'All people' doesn't refer to every single person on the planet; it refers to those who belong to God, the Jews, and those who were yet to come to God, the Gentiles. And we know that the other part of Joel's prophecy was to be fulfilled in Acts 10:44-47.

Joel also prophesied that 'some daughters would prophesy', Joel 2:28 / Acts 2:17, this again was fulfilled a little later in relation to Philip and his four daughters, Acts 21:8-9 / 1 Corinthians 11:5.

The sun turning to darkness and the moon turning to blood, Acts 2:20, is figurative language indicating judgment and a change in government, Isaiah 19:1 / Isaiah 13:10 / Isaiah 34:4 / Ezekiel 32:7-8 / Matthew 24:1-35.

CALLING ON THE NAME

Now, before we move on, I think I need to say something about Acts 2:21, where Joel says, 'whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.' Many people claim that if you just call on the Name of Jesus, you automatically become a Christian, Romans 10:9-10.

In Christianity today, the phrase, 'calling upon the Name of the Lord,' has become a phrase by which a person can be saved without doing anything else. As a result, after admitting they are sinners, many people now believe they are saved simply because they called on Jesus to save them. Let's go ahead and see if we can understand what this phrase actually means.

The first time the phrase is used in the Old Testament is by the prophet Joel, speaking of what people will do in the future in order to be saved, Joel 2:32. And the first time it's used in the New Testament is by Peter as he quotes Joel's words in the very first Gospel sermon ever preached, which tells us that Joel's prophecy was fulfilled during this time, Acts 2:21.

When we carefully examine Acts 2, after informing those present that 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved', we see the response of those present, they asked, 'What shall we do?' Acts 2:37, they were asking, what must they do to be saved?

In what way do we call upon the Lord? If calling on the Name of the Lord simply meant confessing your sinfulness and inviting Jesus into your heart, then surely, Peter would have told them to do just that, but he didn't, Acts 2:38.

Notice what those present on that day did. Even before they asked the question, 'what must we do?' they heard the Gospel, Acts 2:14 / Acts 2:41, and they believed the Gospel, Acts 2:37, and they repented of their sins, Acts 2:38 / Acts 2:41. So what we see here are faith, repentance and baptism. This was how they called upon the Name of the Lord.

The apostle Paul had been taught the Gospel and demonstrated faith and repentance, Acts 22:6-10. Again, if calling upon the Name of the Lord simply meant confessing your sinfulness and inviting Jesus into your heart, then surely, Ananias would have told Him to do just that, but he didn't.

Again, what we see here is faith, repentance and baptism, Acts 9:18. This was how Paul called upon the Name of the Lord. A little later, Paul goes on to write about how God saves people from their sins when he writes to the Romans. Notice also that he quotes from Joel 2:32, just as Peter did.

Paul says, 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved,' Romans 10:13, but it's such a shame that many people just read this one verse without reading it in its context.

A careful reading of the text shows us that ‘calling on the Name of the Lord’ involved hearing and believing the Gospel, **Romans 10:14**. It involved a change of heart, which is repentance, and it involved publicly confessing faith in Jesus as the Christ, **Romans 10:9-10**. It involved obeying the commands of the Gospel, **Romans 10:16 / Romans 10:19-21**.

If ‘calling on the Name of the Lord’ simply meant confessing your sinfulness and inviting Jesus into your heart, then surely, Paul would have told them to do just that, but he didn’t.

Paul, after saying, ‘everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord will be saved,’ goes on to ask a series of questions that tell us what this phrase means, **Romans 10:13-17**.

In other words, to ‘call upon the name of the Lord’ means we must hear the Gospel, believe the Gospel and obey the Gospel. When someone ‘calls upon the name of the Lord’, they are simply obeying God’s plan of salvation to hear God’s word, believing that Jesus is the Son of God, repenting and being baptised.

As I mentioned earlier, there are thousands of people in the religious world today who believe they are saved because they’ve called upon the name of the Lord, **Luke 6:46**.

Sadly, saying the name ‘Lord’ won’t save anyone, **Matthew 7:21-23**. It won’t save anyone unless it’s accompanied by obedience to the Gospel, **Mark 16:16 / Matthew 29:19-20**.

What does ‘Calling on His Name’ mean? Calling on the name of the Lord means a person asking the Lord by the Lord’s authority to set them free from their sins. But that can only be done by yielding to His will as it was expressed in His commandments, **Matthew 7:21**. Calling on His Name needs to be accompanied by obedience to His commandments, **Mark 16:16**.

When Paul is speaking in Aramaic and addresses the crowd, he is giving his testimony, and he quotes Jesus’ own words in **Acts 22:16**. Paul is then baptised, and so, in doing so, he was demonstrating that salvation comes through calling on His Name and being obedient to Him in baptism, **1 Peter 3:21**.

“Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him”. **Acts 2:22-24**

Not one single Jew could deny that Jesus had worked miracles because they had been done in plain view, **Acts 2:22**. Most of Jesus’ miracles were performed in public view for a reason, to create belief in Him, **John 5:36 / John 10:25 / John 20:30-31 / Hebrews 2:4**.

Those miracles should have inspired awe and wonder in the hearts of those who saw them. The miracles of Jesus should have been a clear sign to the Jews that Jesus was more than God’s spokesman; He was also God’s Son.

Some people clearly recognised these displays of God’s power for what they were and believed in the Son, **John 4:46-54**. Some of the Jews who had gone to comfort Mary after Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead believed in Him, **John 11:45**.

But not everybody was convinced. Matthew records an incident where Jesus had just healed a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute. The Pharisees weren’t convinced that Jesus was God’s Son, and so, looking for an excuse to kill Him, they said it was the devil working these miracles through Jesus, **Matthew 12:24**.

We find the same thing happening in **Mark 3:1-6**, when Jesus heals the man with a shrivelled hand, the Jewish leaders refused to believe who He was. Imagine the look on all those Jewish faces when they finally realise that God knew beforehand that they would actually kill Christ? **Acts 2:23**. I wonder if they would have remembered what God said in **Genesis 3:15**?

These Jews, who were God's people, who were so scriptural and spiritual in their thinking, who knew and understood God's Word so well. I wonder if they would remember that the Messiah was to be killed and then raised back to life? **Acts 2:23-24**. I wonder if they remembered Isaiah's words in **Isaiah 53:6-12**, concerning what would happen when the Messiah came?

"I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore, my heart is glad, and my tongue rejoices; my body also will live in hope, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence.'" **Acts 2:25-28**

I wonder if they would have remembered David's words, as Peter quotes them? **Acts 2:25-28**. The fulfilment of David's words in **Psalms 16:8-11** is fulfilled here when Peter speaks of the resurrection of Christ. After His crucifixion and burial, Jesus' body didn't see decay, but He rose from the grave, **Acts 2:27 / Acts 13:34-37**.

I wonder if they realised that David was speaking about the Christ? There is no doubt that **Psalms 16:8-11** prophesies the resurrection of someone. And we know that because it is only by a resurrection that one could descend into the grave and not see decay, **Acts 2:27**. The phrase, 'the grave,' refers to the place where the 'body' ends up. Notice it was Jesus' 'body' which went to the grave, not His soul. It's obvious that Peter is using David's psalm to show that Christ's 'body' did not decay. Jesus 'body' wasn't in the grave long enough for it to begin to decay.

Who is David speaking about? We know that Jesus died, we know that His body was laid in a tomb which was given by Joseph of Arimathea, **Matthew 27:57-61**. But we also know that His spirit would have gone back to God who gave it, **Ecclesiastes 12:7**. But His soul went to paradise, **Luke 16:22 / Luke 23:43-46 / 2 Corinthians 12:2-4 / Revelation 2:7**.

It's plain to see that Jesus trusted the Father to reunite His soul with His resurrected body in a powerful display intended to leave no doubt as to the true identity of Jesus of Nazareth.

"Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay. God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact." **Acts 2:29-32**

Peter's point is that David wasn't speaking about himself; that's why he mentions that David's body saw decay and his remains were still in its grave in the very city of Jerusalem where Peter spoke, **Acts 2:29-31**.

In other words, Peter is saying that David knew when he wrote of God's Holy One, he was not speaking of himself, but through the voice of prophecy, he was speaking of the promised King who would arise from among his offspring, **Acts 2:30**.

Peter and the eleven who stood with him were witnesses of the very resurrection David had foretold, **Acts 2:32**. They had seen Jesus in His resurrected body, **Luke 24:34 / 1 Corinthians 15:5**. If anyone could testify that Jesus Christ was now seated on His throne in heaven, it was Peter.

How could he prove that Jesus is seated at God's right side? The proof was the Holy Spirit's arrival, **John 16:5-15**. Peter says you want help to understand what has happened here today? Do you remember the great prophet, Joel? Do you remember one of the greatest kings of our history, David?

Peter was hitting these Jews from all sides, the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The miraculous events of **Acts 2:1-11**, when they spoke different tongues, were the words of the prophet Joel. The words of the king and prophet David. Peter was spelling it out to them, but Peter wasn't finished just yet; he had more to say concerning King David.

“Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said, “The Lord said to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.” Acts 2:33-35

He says to the Jews, quoting more words of David, **Psalm 110:1 / Acts 2:33-35**. In other words, the Jews had to realise that there was a new King in town, but this new King was also Lord over David, and He too was to rule from a throne, not on earth, but in heaven. Peter says Jesus is Master and King now.

David in the psalm begins by telling us what the LORD, that is, Yahweh, said to the lord, that is, Adonia, that is, Jesus, David’s lord. Please note the word ‘lord,’ used in the NIV, should have a capital ‘L’.

Jesus quotes these words in **Matthew 22:43-45** and **Mark 12:36-37**, to show how David called the Messiah lord, which means that the Messiah was greater than David.

Peter quoted these words in **Acts 2:34-35** to show how David prophesied the deity and accession of Jesus, **Psalm 110:1**. Paul quotes these words in **1 Corinthians 15:25** to demonstrate the rule and dominion of Jesus.

The writer of Hebrews quotes these words, **Hebrews 1:13**, to explain how Jesus is superior to any angel. Later, in **Hebrews 10:13**, the writer quotes these words again to explain the rule and dominion of Jesus.

The LORD, that is God the Father, spoke to the Messiah, that is, Jesus the Son, and told Him He would sit at His right hand until His enemies are made a footstool for His feet, **Ephesians 1:20 / Hebrews 8:1**. In other words, Jesus would remain there until the Father provided the victory, **1 Corinthians 15:20-28 / Hebrews 2:8**.

“Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” Acts 2:36

Just in case they thought Peter was the one giving out all this authority, he tells them, the very One they had crucified has now been placed by God in the position of authority.

Remember that the name Jesus was very common in Biblical times, and here Peter doesn’t want anyone to think about any other Jesus than ‘this Jesus’. Peter proclaimed that God had made this Jesus, the One whom the Jews had crucified, Lord of all things. He was the anointed One, the Messiah of the Jews. He was the Messiah for whom all Israel had been waiting for centuries.

And can you imagine being told that you murdered the very person your nation has been waiting for? Imagine the guy in the temple court selling the ‘big issue’ shouting, ‘Read all about it! Read all about it! The apostles charge us with murdering our very own Messiah!’

Imagine what was going through their minds? We’ve just killed the Messiah! We’ve just murdered this Jesus who was God in the flesh! The Creator and Sustainer of the universe, the Author and Perfecter of our faith. We’ve just killed the very person God spoke about as the head crusher in **Genesis 3:15**! We’ve just murdered the very person the Old Testament prophets spoke about coming!

Peter had opened up two separate prophecies of David before their very eyes. He has presented the testimony of reliable witnesses who had seen the resurrected Lord. He had called his listeners’ attention to the unique events of the day, which had to have originated from heaven itself through the workings of God’s Spirit.

Peter could look out of the temple area onto Jerusalem and say to the Jews, ‘look there lies King David, a faithful and devout follower of God.’ He could dig his grave up, and they would find his remains.

The Jews can’t argue with Peter, because if Jesus’ tomb still contained Jesus’ remains, then surely they would have argued that case. The Jews would have thrown the remainder of Jesus’ bones down on the ground before Peter and said, ‘You see, this Jesus’ body is still here just like David’s.

They didn't because they couldn't, they couldn't because if they were to go to the place where Jesus was buried, they would read this inscription, 'Jesus has risen from the dead.'

It's hard to imagine just how stunned some in Peter's audience must have been. The Jews thought that they had heard the last of this Jesus when they crucified Him.

They were probably thinking, that's that Jesus, the One who wants us to believe He was the Messiah, that's Him dealt with, now we can get on and celebrate Pentecost in peace and go home.

But God had different plans, and Peter, full of God's Spirit, had different plans. The man whom the Jews recognised as a Galilean, and likely viewed him as an uneducated person who had just presented a compelling argument in which he tells them that they murdered the Son of God, **Acts 2:36**.

Out of all the crimes mankind could commit, killing the Messiah was to be the worst. Peter's presentation was so powerful, not because he was an intellect, not because he had a good education, but because of the 'Comforter', or 'Helper', or 'Advocate,' because of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit used undeniable truths to show Jesus was the Son of God, despite the Jews' accusations to the contrary, **John 16:8-11**. The evidence presented by Peter on Pentecost, as delivered to him by the Comforter, truly convicted many in his audience, **John 16:8-11**. It was so powerful, Luke says it cut the Jews to the heart, **Acts 2:38**.

"When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" **Acts 2:37**

Those words, 'cut to the heart,' are the Greek word, 'katanusso,' and it means to pierce thoroughly. In other words, when the realisation of what they did thoroughly hit home in their hearts, they panicked and asked, 'What shall we do?' In effect, they're asking, what can we do to make things right? How can we be right with God after doing this?

Do you remember in **Matthew 16:19** what Jesus promised to Peter? Jesus promised Peter, 'I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.'

And do you remember Jesus' words on the cross in **Luke 23:34**? Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing'. Both these passages find the beginning of their fulfilment in **Acts 2:38**. The Holy Spirit, through Peter, had already identified those in the crowd as those who had used lawless hands to crucify God's Son, **Acts 2:23 / Acts 2:36**.

Talk about panic stations, they were probably waiting for heaven to open up and swallow them whole because of what they had done. They were probably waiting on one of God's angels to come down to slay them all because of what they had done. And it's then that some of them start to panic and ask Peter, 'what they must do to be saved', **Acts 2:37**. And so Peter tells them what they must do to be saved.

"Repent and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off-for all whom the Lord our God will call." **Acts 2:38-39**

Can you imagine the Jews' response to Peter's answer to their question, what they must do to be saved? Can you imagine what is going on in their minds? We have just killed the Messiah, who was God in the flesh, and you're talking about forgiveness! We have just murdered the Creator of the Universe on a cross, and He wants to give us a gift! This is all about the love of God, **Ephesians 3:18**.

Now, can you imagine their first response to Peter's words in their minds? Peter, we've admitted that we crucified Jesus, we know we're guilty of killing the Messiah, we understand that we murdered God in the flesh, and you're talking about forgiveness!

Peter, are you sure you're not drunk? Are you sure all we have to do is repent and be baptised in the Name of the very person we crucified to be forgiven? And Peter says, yes, it's that simple, just think differently about your life and turn to Jesus, just do spiritually what Jesus did physically.

Die with Him in baptism, be buried with Him in baptism and rise again to a new life with Him, **Romans 6:3-5**. And I can imagine them saying, but Peter, we crucified the Lord and Messiah, and you're talking about God giving us a gift!

And I can imagine Peter saying, yes, it's that simple, when you are baptised, God will give you a piece of Himself to help you live a life worthy of being called a follower of Jesus.

But how is all this possible, Peter? All of this is possible because Jesus died for us, was buried, but rose again. Now the local paparazzi are on the scene, listening to this conversation and taking pictures.

The 'Jerusalem Times' on its front page has a picture of these Jews crying, with the headline, 'God offers forgiveness to anyone who admits they are sinners.' On the front page of the 'Temple News' newspaper, it reads 'Jews overcome with joy as God offers free gift to anyone who is baptised'.

Peter says there are two requirements to receive this forgiveness of sins, and the first one is repentance, **Acts 2:38**. Repenting involves a change of will or mind, but it's more than feeling sorry for what we have done; it's more than feeling sorry for ourselves, **Matthew 21:28-32**.

Repentance involves a deep sorrow for our actions. It involves a deep sorrow when we realise that we have deeply hurt God with our actions, **2 Corinthians 7:10**. When someone genuinely repents of sin, they don't want to go out and commit that sin again because they know that God doesn't like it and they don't want to hurt God.

Peter tells them the second requirement to receive forgiveness of sins, he commands them to be baptised, **Acts 2:38**. Unlike the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which the apostles received, they were to be baptised in water.

Baptism is a dipping, plunging, immersing or overwhelming, and the Jews had no problems understanding what baptism was. It is a funeral service, baptism is a burial, **Colossians 2:12**. Peter tells us that baptism is the means of one's calling on God to cleanse him based upon the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, **1 Peter 3:21**.

What Peter commanded these people to do to be saved is exactly what Jesus commanded everyone to do to be saved, **Matthew 28:19-20 / Mark 16:15-16**. This is the example we see throughout the Book of Acts of people being saved, **Acts 2:37-41 / Acts 8:36-38 / Acts 10:47-48 / Acts 16:13-15 / Acts 16:27-34 / Acts 18:5-8 / Acts 19:1-5 / Acts 22:14-17**.

Elements of Conversion in the Book of Acts

Text	Teaching	Believing	Confessing	Repenting	Baptizing
Acts 2:38	YES	IMPLIED	IMPLIED	YES	YES
Acts 8:12	YES	YES	IMPLIED	IMPLIED	YES
Acts 8:13	IMPLIED	YES	IMPLIED	IMPLIED	YES
Acts 8:37	YES	IMPLIED	YES	IMPLIED	YES
Acts 9:5	YES	IMPLIED	IMPLIED	IMPLIED	YES
Acts 10:34	YES	YES	IMPLIED	YES	YES
Acts 16:14	YES	IMPLIED	IMPLIED	IMPLIED	YES
Acts 16:25	YES	YES	IMPLIED	YES	YES
Acts 17:32	YES	YES	IMPLIED	IMPLIED	IMPLIED
Acts 18:8	YES	YES	IMPLIED	IMPLIED	YES
Acts 19:1	YES	IMPLIED	IMPLIED	IMPLIED	YES

If baptism isn't a necessity for salvation, then why did every single person who became a Christian, as recorded in the Book of Acts, get baptised?

Notice also that repentance and baptism were to be done in the Name of Jesus.

In other words, they were to be baptised resting on His name, submitting to His authority, depending on Him as Saviour and Lord, Acts 4:12. The point is that repentance and baptism under the authority of Jesus was to receive the promised result of the forgiveness of sins, Acts 2:38.

ARE WE BAPTISED IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST OR IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, THE SON AND THE HOLY SPIRIT?

I received a phone call one evening from a total stranger, and the very first thing he said to me was in the form of a question, which was, 'If we, that is the church, baptise in the Name of Jesus or in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit?' Matthew 28:19.

At first, I was wondering why he would ask such a question but after he explained his thoughts behind the question, he became very aggressive and stated that 'if anyone in 'my' church has been baptised 'in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit,' then their baptism was invalid and therefore they are still in their sins and bound for hell.'

Sadly, I didn't get a chance to explain what the Bible actually says to him, as he just hung up the phone. The clear command of Jesus is to baptise 'In the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit', but why do we see so many instances in the New Testament where people were baptised 'in Jesus' name'?

I think it's important to understand words and their meanings in the Scriptures, especially the original text in Hebrew or Greek; otherwise, we can get ourselves into all kinds of problems concerning what any passage of Scripture means. Notice the Greek word for 'into' that Matthew uses; he writes,

'Baptizing them into 'eis' the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit' Matthew 28:19

Luke in the Book of Acts uses the same Greek word, but also uses different Greek words.

‘Baptized in ‘epi’ the name of Jesus Christ’. Acts 2:38

‘Baptized into ‘eis’ the name of the Lord Jesus’. Acts 8:16

‘Baptized in ‘en’ the name of Jesus Christ.’ Acts 10:48

‘Baptized into ‘eis’ the name of the Lord Jesus.’ Acts 19:5

The reason they were baptised ‘in the name of Jesus’ isn’t that the words were some kind of magical formula, but because the phrase, ‘in the name of’ means in the authority of, Acts 4:7-10.

‘In the name of Jesus Christ’ is simply by the authority of Jesus, we are immersed by His authority, Acts 2:38, but ‘baptising them ‘in’ the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,’ Matthew 28:19, means something else. Look at the footnote of your Bible for Matthew 28:19, the word ‘in’ can also mean ‘into’.

What difference does that make? Well, we’re baptised ‘in’ the Name of Jesus, but at the same time, we’re baptised ‘into’ a relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Galatians 3:26-27 / Romans 6:1-4.

Adam and Eve were truly blessed to have God walking in their midst in the Garden of Eden, Genesis 3:8. The Israelites were truly blessed to have God dwell in the tabernacle, Exodus 25:8. They were truly blessed when He dwelt in Solomon’s temple, 2 Samuel 7:2 / 2 Chronicles 7:1. But these early Christians were going to be blessed even more.

Peter says when a person, repents and is then baptised for the forgiveness of their sins, they will receive the gift, not gifts, of the Holy Spirit, Acts 2:38. In other words, God was not going to dwell in a tent or a temple anymore, He was going to dwell within the hearts of His people, Ezekiel 36:27 / 1 Corinthians 6:19 / 2 Corinthians 6:16.

GIFT, NOT GIFTS

It is this second promise that many Christians find difficult to understand. Notice that Peter spoke of the ‘gift’, not ‘gifts’ of the Holy Spirit. In Acts 2:38, the word ‘gift’ is the word ‘dorea’, which is accurately defined as ‘free gift’. One translation renders it rather expressively as, ‘the plus of the Holy Spirit’.

The word describes the Holy Spirit Himself as the extra gift provided by God, for those who obey the Gospel.

Thus, Acts 2:38 doesn’t refer to some sort of miraculous or spiritual gift bestowed by the Holy Spirit.

It tells us that the Holy Spirit Himself is the Heavenly Father’s own gift to His obedient people, given to enable them to live a successful and satisfying Christian life.

THE GIFTS

When, later, Paul wrote to the Corinthian church about ‘spiritual gifts’, he was dealing with a very different subject. In 1 Corinthians 12-14, the nine gifts bestowed by the Holy Spirit are described as ‘charisma’, or ‘grace gifts’, and it is important to distinguish between the Holy Spirit as God’s own gift, and the miraculous gifts which, in the New Testament age, the Spirit Himself bestowed. Please notice the following.

1. The ‘charismata’ were various miraculous abilities or endowments, which the Holy Spirit Himself gave to individual believers, according to His own will, 1 Corinthians 12:11.
2. Believers did not all receive the same gift(s), 1 Corinthians 12:29-30.

3. Nor were these gifts intended to last, 1 Corinthians 13:8.
4. In contrast, the ‘gift of the Holy Spirit’ is the gift of God Himself, offered to every obedient believer, Acts 5:32.
5. All are offered the same gift, the indwelling presence of His Spirit, 1 Corinthians 6:19 / Romans 8:9.
6. And, along with salvation, the gift of the Spirit’s presence will continue to be offered until the end of the Christian Age, Acts 2:39.

THE PURPOSE OF THE GIFT

What will this ‘gift’ do for us? This is a question worthy of a separate study, but think about just two aspects of His ministry.

A. The Holy Spirit is described as the ‘Comforter’, John 14:26.

That English word comes to us from the Latin, ‘con fortis’, which literally means, ‘with strength’. Thus, the Holy Spirit strengthens us. We need to learn to lean on Him.

B. The Holy Spirit helps us when we pray, taking our faltering, stumbling petitions and presenting them to the Father, as our intercessor, Romans 8:26-27. We should make use of His intercession.

That promise wasn’t just for the Jews and their children; it is for our children and us today, Acts 2:39. That was one lesson that Peter had to learn, after the supernatural events of Cornelius and his household, Acts 10:34.

The Spirit is ready to give life to anyone who will submit to God. Because when a person submits to the will of God through repentance and baptism, God comes to live in them in the form of the Spirit. And it’s then and only then that an individual’s body is his temple, 1 Corinthians 6:19-20.

Please note, if there is no repentance, then there is no gift of the Holy Spirit. If there is no baptism for the forgiveness of sins, then there is no gift of the Holy Spirit.

CONTRAST WATER BAPTISM WITH HOLY SPIRIT BAPTISM

1. Water baptism is for ‘all Nations’ and is required of every creature who is subject to the Gospel, Matthew 28:19-20 / Mark 16:15-16 / Galatians 3:26-29.

1. Holy Spirit baptism was poured out once upon the apostles. Jesus promised the apostles that the Spirit of Truth, which the world cannot receive, John 14:17 / Luke 24:46-49, would ‘guide them into all truth’.

2. Water baptism is a command of God, Matthew 28:19 / Acts 2:38 / Acts 10:48 / Acts 22:16.

2. Holy Spirit baptism was a promise of God fulfilled in Acts 2:4, and since coming into the world, He is now available to indwell His people, Acts 2:38 / Titus 3:6. The Power was given to apostles, as the Spirit willed, Mark 9:1 / Mark 16:17 / 1 Corinthians 12:11.

3. Water baptism is an act of obedience and an act of man, Acts 2:38 / Acts 10:48 / Acts 22:16 and is ‘for the forgiveness of sins’.

3. Holy Spirit baptism was an act of God, not an act of man, Acts 1:5 / Acts 2:4, and was not for salvation, but given to confirm the word, Hebrews 2:4.

4. Water baptism is administered by men or by those doing the teaching, 1 Corinthians 1:14.

4. Holy Spirit baptism was to be given by Jesus, **Matthew 3:11 / John 1:33 / Acts 2:4.**
5. Water baptism is a condition of salvation, **Mark 16:15-16 / 1 Peter 3:21 / Hebrews 9:14.**
5. Holy Spirit baptism was not related to salvation.
6. Water baptism is 'INTO the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit', **Matthew 28:19 / Acts 2:38 / Acts 8:14-16 / Acts 22:16 / 1 Corinthians 6:11.**
6. Holy Spirit baptism had no formula because it wasn't performed by man, **Matthew 3:11.**
7. Water baptism demonstrates the believer's faith, **Galatians 3:26-27 / Mark 16:15-16 / Colossians 2:12.**
7. Holy Spirit baptism was not a human act and did not require faith, **Matthew 3:11 / John 1:33.**
8. Water baptism represents the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, **Colossians 2:12 / Romans 6:1-6.**
8. Holy Spirit baptism had no such symbolism. It was the indication of the bestowal of 'authority' and the 'power' which accompanies authority, **Acts 1:5 / Acts 2:4 / Acts 2:17 / Acts 2:38.**
9. Water baptism is a baptism of repentance, that is, it belongs to and grows out of repentance, **Mark 1:4 / Luke 13:3 / Acts 19:4 / Acts 2:38.**
9. Holy Spirit baptism came before the first Gospel sermon of Peter, **Mark 1:4 / Luke 7:29-30 / Acts 1:5 / Acts 2:4.**
10. Water baptism is a condition of cleansing from sin, **Acts 22:16 / Ephesians 5:25-27 / John 8:31-32.**
10. Holy Spirit baptism came along after the apostles were cleansed by the word, **John 15:3**, not for cleansing but to confirm, **Hebrews 2:4.**
11. Water baptism puts one into Christ, **Romans 6:1-4 / Galatians 3:26-27.**
11. Holy Spirit baptism was poured out after the apostles were already in Christ and had been urged to 'abide' in Him, **John 15:1-6 / Acts 2:1-4.**
12. Water baptism was in order to receive the gift of the Spirit, **Acts 2:38 / Acts 5:32.**
12. Holy Spirit baptism was the one-time act of the coming of the Spirit into the world **1 John 2:2 / 1 Timothy 2:6 / Hebrews 2:9.** Just as Jesus' blood was shed as a one-time act but has an ongoing benefit for all. Power was to cease when the message was confirmed, **1 Corinthians 13:1-9.**
13. Water baptism must continue even to the end of the age, **Matthew 28:19-20.**
13. Holy Spirit baptism was a one-time event. No two baptisms are known after the Ephesian letter written, **Ephesians 4:5.**

"With many other words, he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day". **Acts 2:40-41**

Jesus taught us to pray, 'thy kingdom come', **Matthew 6:10**, and then He promised that some who were alive would see His kingdom come with power, **Mark 9:1**, after He died, was buried and rose again, His kingdom came. The church was born, and it was made up of people who had been born again, **John 3:1-20.**

Peter's warning and his plea stand just as strong today as it was first heard through the lips of Peter just over 2000 years ago. People need to save themselves from this wicked generation in which we live today, **Acts 2:40.**

Wait a minute, I thought we were saved by grace, and we can't do anything to save ourselves! In one sense, we are saved by grace, but saving ourselves means doing something for ourselves.

We put ourselves into a position where we can be saved, that is, within the grace of God and accepting His grace. We trust in what God has done to provide our salvation and not in our works for salvation, **Ephesians 2:8-9.** We need to remember that when we preach and teach from the Word of God, we are really preaching and teaching the very words of Christ Himself.

And that day when Peter preached the very first Gospel sermon, he was preaching the words given him by Jesus Himself. When three thousand souls accepted Peter's words and were baptised, **Acts 2:41**, they were actually

accepting Christ and His words, **John 13:20**. And because they received the Lord's words, they were added together in the kingdom.

There were several pools in Jerusalem, and so it was possible to baptise three thousand people in a short period of time. At 9:00 am, Peter starts speaking, and by 10:00 am, they start baptising, and by 3:00, they would have finished.

Remember back in Exodus, after everything God had done for Israel, only the tribe of Levi said, 'We are on God's side', **Exodus 32:28**. And so, after each man chose the side they wanted to be on, Moses then gave the orders to have all the people who did not choose God to be killed right there on the spot. The Bible says that three thousand men were killed that day due to their rebellion against God Almighty Himself, **Exodus 32:26-29**.

Pause for a moment and think about this because it really is the beginning of the Mosaic age in the Bible. The law was about to be introduced by God through Moses, and three thousand souls died on the very day it was introduced.

What happened when grace and truth appeared through Jesus? **John 1:17**. The law could only highlight people's sins but the law couldn't save people from their sins, but Jesus can, **Titus 2:11**.

When the law was introduced on that day at Sinai, when the Mosaic age began, three thousand souls died, but what happened when grace and truth came through Jesus? What happened on the day of Pentecost when Peter preached grace and truth?

Don't you find it incredible that when the Mosaic age began, three thousand souls died, but when grace and truth appeared, **Titus 2:11**, when the Christian age began, three thousand souls were saved? **Acts 2:41**.

We can read into that as much or as little as we want. I'm just going to say that I don't believe in coincidences. I don't believe that the number of souls being saved at three thousand is just some random number. I believe this was another reminder to those Jews who didn't get saved on Pentecost of the consequences of not being obedient to God and His ways.

The Bible nowhere teaches that we join the church; the Bible says that the 'Lord adds us to His church,' **Acts 2:41**. A few verses later, Luke tells us the same thing, **Acts 2:47**.

We don't join the Lord's church like it's some sort of association or club; the Lord adds us to His church, **Daniel 2:31-35 / Daniel 2:39-44 / Matthew 16:18-19**. It is so important to realise that the Lord is the one who is responsible for adding to His church and bringing forth fruit, **1 Corinthians 3:6-7**.

What Luke records next for us is so important for us to understand and take note of. These baby Christians, just a few hours old, began to do something which would influence the rest of their Christian lives.

They are about to be taught so that they go on and teach others as Jesus commanded, **Matthew 28:18-20 / 2 Timothy 2:2**. And what we see happening next is that very thing, the apostles began to teach Jesus' disciples.

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."
Acts 2:42

We should note that the word 'the' should be before the word 'prayers', as it is with the other activities mentioned here. Luke tells us that five things should dominate the life of a Christian.

1. We need to sit at the feet of the church's teachers and learn.
2. We need to be around other Christians as much as we can, not just on Sundays.
3. We need to come together with other saints to partake of the Lord's Supper every week.
4. We need to be praying.
5. We need to learn to give.

What was the first fundamental truth they taught them? The apostles taught them the importance of meeting together to learn from God's Word, **2 Peter 3:18**.

In other words, they were to start as they mean to go on. We can't just baptise someone and then leave them to it, we need to teach them, baptise them and then teach them again, **Matthew 28:18-20**.

We need to teach people the importance of obeying God's Word. We need to share with them that they can't be a strong Christian on their own; they need to be around other Christians to give encouragement and receive encouragement, **Hebrews 10:24-25**.

Fellowship is all about being part of a family, living together as a family, and sharing as a family. The word fellowship in Greek is 'koinonia', and it means receiving and giving in partnership.

This is where we get our example for taking up an offering each week; we find another example in **1 Corinthians 16:1-2**. And so, these young Christians weren't just added to the church; they were added to a family.

We also need to let them know that our memories are pretty poor, but we must never forget what Christ has done for us all by partaking of the Lord's Supper every first day of the week, **Luke 22:19-20 / 1 Corinthians 11:24-25**.

When Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, He knew very well that we humans are prone to forget. And that's one of the reasons He asked us to come together as a family to remember Him every Lord's Day, the first day of the week, **Luke 24:30-32 / Acts 20:7**.

When we partake of the Supper, we're proclaiming to the world who we are and to Whom we belong. We're proclaiming to the world that Jesus died for us and one day He's coming back to take us home, **1 Corinthians 11:23-26**.

When we're talking about 'the prayers', we're not talking about an opening prayer or a closing prayer in worship; we're talking about the prayers of the church. When the early church met, they set aside some time solely for praying, kind of like what some do during their prayer meetings.

Remember, Jesus' own disciples didn't know how to pray, and so they asked Jesus to teach them, **Luke 11:1**. And I'm sure that the apostles would have taught these young Christians how to pray. We need to demonstrate how important communication with the Father is, **Matthew 6:9-13 / 1 Thessalonians 5:17**.

That attitude should be the pattern for the rest of our Christian lives. Because when that is our pattern, we are going to love and enjoy being around those people who share in that same pattern. To us today, these things which are happening here may not be a big deal, but when we put ourselves in the shoes of these Jews, we learn something new.

They had never been involved in the breaking of the bread before. This is an obvious reference to the Lord's Supper, **Acts 20:7**, since there would be nothing remarkable about new Christians continuing to eat.

Think about their past prayer life. In Judaism, prayers were offered at stated times of the day. These first Christians offered prayers at any and all times, and in any and all places, **1 Thessalonians 5:17**. And because of this holy example of living, together with the miracles worked by the apostles, caused the surrounding community to be in awe.

"Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need." **Acts 2:43-45**

Notice another important lesson the apostles taught them. God's presence filled them with awe, **Acts 2:43**. The word 'awe' means 'fear', and Luke tells us that everyone was frightened because the presence of God was shown through the apostles and the miracles they did.

Remember, these first Christians would have been alienated from the Jewish society, **John 4:9 / Acts 10:28**; they're now outcasts from the Jewish religion. So, in a very real sense, the church had become a support group.

As a new family, they met together, and they recognised there is strength in coming together. And notice that ‘all’ of them were together, not just some but all, Acts 2:44.

The phrase, ‘everything in common,’ Acts 2:44, means they saw themselves as a body with one common bond, Ephesians 4:4-6. They enjoyed each other’s company and gladly shared their material possessions with anyone who had need, Acts 2:45. In other words, they taught them the importance of giving, Acts 20:35.

The church did something that had never been done before in this way: ‘they sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need,’ Acts 2:45. Isn’t it interesting that they prepared themselves spiritually first before they did something absolutely alien? 2 Corinthians 8:5. Why did they sell their properties and their possessions? Who are those who had a need? Acts 2:45.

Selling your property wasn’t a strange idea in Biblical times; you could sell your property, but not permanently, because the original owner had the right to buy back the land he sold, Leviticus 25:23-24.

But here in this new kingdom, things have changed. They sold their property and their possessions with no buy-back clause, because there is no buyback cause in Christ’s kingdom.

They sold their properties and their possessions because there was a need. The Day of Pentecost was one of the busiest times of the year, and people would come prepared to stay a few days and go home. They would bring their young children with them and maybe some relatives.

We all budget for our holidays, we make sure we have enough money to cover all the costs and maybe take a little extra for emergencies. With all the events surrounding the apostles and the church being established, people have used up their trip budget.

People have stayed longer to see what’s going on. These new Christians have stayed longer than they planned, and so there is a need. There’s a need to supply the basics, like food and water, and maybe somewhere to stay.

These first Christians did everything they could to help meet the needs of everyone and anyone who was in need, Galatians 6:10. They’ve just become Christians, and straightaway they’re learning the blessing of giving and sharing. They’re learning the blessing of fellowship, the receiving and giving in partnership.

We should be a giving people, not just of our lives to God, but also of our riches. It’s not so much the amount we give but the attitude within our hearts when we do give. Paul says he wants us to set aside a sum of money within our income, 1 Corinthians 16:2.

We should give what we have decided to give because God loves a cheerful giver, 2 Corinthians 9:7. God doesn’t want us to give so much that we can’t pay our bills and end up starving ourselves, but at the same time, if He has blessed us with a good income, He does expect us to give to His work.

“Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people.” Acts 2:46-47

Unlike the world today, where most people live miles away from each other and live such busy schedules, these first converts were in the temple daily. But notice, they also spent time together on a daily basis, as ‘breaking bread from house to house,’ would seem to indicate, Acts 2:46. Note the breaking of bread here isn’t a reference to the Lord’s Supper.

It doesn’t say, ‘they broke ‘the’ bread’, Acts 2:42, it is simply a reference to coming together to share a meal, Acts 20:11 / Romans 12:13. Their daily getting together and sharing of food was done out of hearts filled with ‘extreme joy’.

When these early Christians praised God for the forgiveness of sins and the community of believers of which He had made them a part, the other people who lived in Jerusalem found them to be an acceptable group, and so Luke goes on to say that the Lord added to their number, **Acts 2:47**.

When we get together for whatever the occasion, and people see us enjoying each other's company, they can see salvation in our lives; people are going to be attracted to the light, **Matthew 5:14-16**.

Today, as followers of our Jesus Christ, when we give ourselves over to daily study, sharing, meeting together and when our hearts are filled with extreme joy and simplicity, people will notice.

Think about the adjustments these new Christians had to make in their lives. They used to follow all the laws and decrees of God from the Old Testament, but now they don't, **Jeremiah 31:31-34 / Galatians 3:15-4:7 / Colossians 2:13-14 / Romans 6:14-15 / Romans 7:4-6 / Hebrews 8:1-10:18**.

They've been told time and time again that the Gentiles and Greeks are unclean and people to be avoided, but now they're worshipping together and enjoying fellowship with the very people they were once told to avoid, **Galatians 3:28-29**.

They used to meet on the Sabbath for worship, but now they're meeting on the Lord's Day for worship, **Acts 20:7 / 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 / Revelation 1:10**. They've been worshipping God on the Sabbath for centuries, and they're used to getting up on Saturday mornings for worship.

Imagine them being used to going to the temple for worship, but now they can worship wherever they like with like-minded people, **John 4:21-23 / Acts 7:48-49**. They've been cast out from their Jewish family and have been embraced by their new Christian family. But they're helping and supporting each other as a family should, as a church should.

CHAPTER 3

INTRODUCTION

“One day, Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer, at three in the afternoon. Now a man crippled from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts.” **Acts 3:1-2**

PETER HEALS A LAME BEGGAR

Peter and John, who once had been partners in the fishing business, **Matthew 4:18-22**, are depicted by Luke as going to the temple at 3 in the afternoon, which was one of the hours of prayer, **Acts 3:1 / Acts 2:15**. There were at least 2 hours of prayer during a given day, the first was at 9 a.m. and the second at 3 p.m. **Psalms 55:17 / Daniel 6:10**.

We are not told why the apostles went to the temple; maybe they went at three in the afternoon, both to pray and to have an opportunity to speak to others about Jesus.

But no matter what their purpose was, an encounter with a man who had been lame since the time of his birth gave them a great opportunity to preach the Gospel.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘This is the first of 14 miracles in Acts (by Peter: [Acts 3:1-10](#) / [Acts 5:1-11](#) / [Acts 5:17-26](#) / [Acts 9:32-42](#); by an angel: [Acts 12:1-19](#) / [Acts 12:20-23](#), and by Paul: [Acts 13:4-12](#) / [Acts 14:8-11](#) / [Acts 16:16-40](#) / [Acts 20:7-12](#) / [Acts 28:3-8](#). These include four healings (three paralytics and one involving fever), two raisings from the dead, four liberations (two from physical bondage and two involving exorcisms), three acts of judgment, and one preservation miracle. There are also 10 summary notices of miracles in Acts, [Acts 2:43](#) / [Acts 5:12](#) / [Acts 5:15-16](#) / [Acts 6:8](#) / [Acts 8:6-7](#) / [Acts 8:13](#) / [Acts 14:3](#) / [Acts 19:11-12](#) / [Acts 28:9](#).’

In every generation, there have always been people in need. Have you ever noticed that most beggars always beg at a prominent spot? They always beg in the place where they are most likely to catch most people walking by, this lame man was no exception.

He lay there every day at the temple gate, [Acts 3:2](#), because many people would walk in and out of the temple at different times of the day; it’s a prime spot for begging.

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

‘In the East, it was the custom for beggars to sit begging at the entrance to a temple or a shrine. Such a place was, and still is, considered the best of all stances because, when people are on their way to worship God, they are disposed to be generous to their fellow men.’

He was begging for food, clothes or money from those coming in and out of the temple to pray, not because he wanted to but because he had to. He had to survive; he’s a disabled person, he can’t work or get a job, and there are no disability benefits like people receive today. He had to beg to survive.

He’s lying here at a gate called Beautiful, [Acts 3:2](#). This is the Nicanor Gate or Corinthian Gate that leads from the court of the Gentiles to the court of the women. These gates were decorated with a golden vine and diamonds.

Josephus describes the gate in the following manner.

‘Its height was fifty cubits, 84f, and its doors were forty cubits, 67f, and it was adorned after a most costly manner as having much richer and thicker plates of silver and gold upon them than the others.’ The other gates were all just 30 cubits or 45’ high.’

Therefore, we see a contrasting picture: the ugly man sitting next to the beautiful gates. Since he’s been there a long time, he had probably seen Jesus earlier as well, maybe just a few weeks before. This must have been a beautiful gate to look at, but what is about to happen next is something even more beautiful.

“When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, “Look at us!” So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them. Then Peter said, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk. Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God”.

[Acts 3:3-8](#)

As Peter and John approached the guy, the lame man asked them to give him money, [Acts 3:3](#). Both apostles looked at him, and Peter asked him to look at them, and so, the beggar turned, expecting to receive some money, but Peter immediately informed him they did not have silver or gold, [Acts 4:4-6](#).

Can you imagine the disappointment the lame man must have felt when he heard those words? There’s nothing worse than building your hopes up to receive something and then being let down.

However, that disappointing low was turned into an emotional high when Peter healed him under the authority of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. When Peter pulled him up by his right hand, the lame man felt strength come into his ankles and went walking, leaping and praising God into the temple, [Acts 3:7](#) / [Isaiah 35:6](#).

When a person is healed in the Name of Jesus Christ, the result is always the same. We need to note that the lame man expressed no faith in the apostle's ability to heal him; in fact, he only asked them for money. As Luke records it, the lame man didn't even try to stand up but was pulled to his feet, [Acts 3:7](#).

Unlike the miraculous claims of many today, this miracle was absolutely undeniable. It's also quite an ironic fact that many of today's so-called faith healers need a big audience, and they want money in advance to heal someone.

This man didn't pray to be healed, this man didn't pay any money to be healed, this man wasn't told to wait for a few days, and he will be healed. This man wasn't some unknown person from the backstreets of Jerusalem; although he was lame, he was also well known. Everyone recognised this man as the lame man who had daily lay at the Beautiful Gate begging for money.

Here's a man who has probably been begging for help for almost forty years, [Acts 4:22](#). We don't know for certain exactly how long he's been begging, but we do know that he was well known. This man could have been at the temple even when Mary and Joseph brought Jesus, [Luke 2:41-52](#).

“When all the people saw him walking and praising God, they recognised him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.” Acts 3:9-10

The people were amazed because they saw the formerly lame man standing before them, [Acts 3:9-10](#). I wonder if some within the audience thought of Isaiah's words, which refer to the future glory of Zion, [Isaiah 35:6](#).

PETER SPEAKS TO THE ONLOOKERS

“While the beggar held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade. When Peter saw this, he said to them: “Men of Israel, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this.” Acts 3:11-15

Now the healed lame man is holding onto Peter and John, [Acts 3:11](#). It was natural that a crowd would gather around Peter and John, and so Peter, empowered by the Holy Spirit to speak, seized the opportunity to preach about the great healer, Jesus.

At Solomon's Colonnade, [Acts 3:11](#) / [John 10:23](#) / [Acts 5:12](#), Luke tells us that the crowd looked at them as if they themselves had somehow worked this miracle, but Peter instantly stopped them from praising them, [Acts 3:12](#) / [Acts 14:12](#).

Peter now turned their attention to ‘the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers,’ and the glorified Jesus, His Son, [Acts 3:13](#) / [Isaiah 42:1](#) / [Isaiah 52:13](#) / [Isaiah 53:11](#).

The words, ‘the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob,’ tell us that the apostles never distant themselves from Judaism but made a point that rather every Jew should become a Christian.

We are not just ‘New Testament Christians’, simply because there are no Old Testament Christians, but rather all our history is based on the Jewish anticipations of the King who should restore the Kingdom promised a long time ago. Therefore, our identity is not just found merely in the ‘church’ but in the kingdom.

Notice as we go through this chapter that Jesus is the main figure. He's described as a servant, [Acts 3:13](#). He's described as the holy and righteous One, [Acts 3:14](#).

He's described as the author of life, [Acts 3:15](#). He's described as the Christ who suffered, [Acts 3:18](#). Christ was appointed for us, [Acts 3:20](#), and finally, He's described as a prophet, [Acts 3:22](#).

Can you imagine the expressions on their faces when Peter tells them Jesus was the servant, [Acts 3:13](#) / [Isaiah 42:1](#) / [Isaiah 49:6-7](#) / [Isaiah 52:13](#) / [Isaiah 53:11](#) / [Mark 10:45](#).

They had disowned the Holy One, [Acts 3:14](#) / [Psalms 16:10](#) / [Isaiah 31:1](#) / [Mark 1:24](#) / [1 John 2:20](#), and the Righteous One, [Acts 3:13](#) / [Isaiah 53:11](#) / [Zechariah 9:9](#) / [1 John 2:1](#).

They asked that a murderer be released to them, [Acts 3:14](#) / [Matthew 27:15-26](#). Pilate wanted to release Jesus, but the Jews disowned him, [Acts 3:13](#) / [John 18:28-40](#). The people of God so often rebel against God.

They delivered, denied and killed the 'Author of life'? [Acts 3:15](#) / [Psalms 16](#) / [John 1:1-18](#) / [Colossians 1:14-20](#) / [Hebrews 1:2-3](#) / [Hebrews 2:10](#) / [Hebrews 5:9](#) / [Hebrews 12:2](#).

I believe their expressions would have been similar to when Peter first preached in [Acts 2](#), and told them the exact same thing, [Acts 2:36](#). But Peter doesn't leave them with that thought; he told them that God had raised Jesus from the dead, [Acts 3:15](#), a fact which Peter and John had personally witnessed, remember, [Luke 24:36-49](#).

“By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see. Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer. Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.” [Acts 3:16-19](#)

Peter said that it was his faith in the authority of Jesus that made it possible for him to heal the lame man, [Acts 3:16](#).

The lame man had been healed in the authority of Jesus, not because of his faith in the apostles but because of the apostles' complete faith in their Lord's ability to make men whole, [Acts 3:16](#) / [Matthew 9:22](#) / [Luke 17:6](#).

The power to perform miracles was given to the apostles by virtue of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, [John 14:16-17](#) / [John 14:26](#) / [John 15:26](#) / [John 16:13-15](#), but they needed to exercise faith before this power could be used.

The recognition of that miracle by those Jews now gathered around Peter and John would have left them with no options but to recognise Jesus as King. In other words, the faith that they had in Jesus resulted in the healing, [Acts 4:10](#) / [Acts 14:9](#). The faith was with Peter and John, not with the crippled man.

Peter tells them they acted in ignorance just as their leaders did, [Acts 3:17](#). They had no idea what they were actually doing, [1 Corinthians 2:8](#). For some, it is more convenient and sophisticated to talk to others about health, jobs, etc, rather than tell about life after the death of Christ.

When Peter said these words, many would have readily seen that he meant they had crucified God's Anointed. Why did they kill the Messiah? Some killed Him because of political reasons. Some killed Him because of jealousy and hatred. But Peter says they killed Him because they did not fully understand.

He tells them everything happened because it was part of God's plan, [Acts 3:18](#). A plan that God had laid out so long before the actual events took place. A plan which included the suffering of Christ.

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following.

‘All the prophets had declared this; some of them in express terms, others indirectly and by symbols; but, as the whole Mosaic dispensation referred to Christ, all that prophesied or ministered under it must have referred to him also.’

On the basis of the great miracle worked in the Jews' midst and the undeniable fact of Christ's resurrection, Peter appealed to the multitude to turn from their sinful lives and be converted or transformed, [Acts 3:19](#). In other words, he asks them, ‘if you want to live, follow Jesus’.

Notice, he does not say ‘be baptised,’ as we are accustomed to hearing in a typical sermon outline, believe, repent, be baptised. However, we can clearly see that conversion takes place in the waters of baptism, just as Peter commanded the Jews earlier, [Acts 2:38](#).

Since a person coming up out of the watery grave is made to walk in newness of life, it would certainly be reasonable to call the effects of baptism a conversion, [Romans 6:3-11](#). In other words, the transformation comes in the form of the sins of the obedient person being erased.

On Pentecost, Peter said those following his instructions would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, [Acts 2:38](#), but here he says the same thing, but with different words; he describes it here as ‘times of refreshing’, which would certainly be the result of receiving the Comforter.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘On Pentecost, [Acts 2:38](#), Peter had preached: 1. Repent ye, 2. and be baptised, 3. for the remission of sins, and 4. ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Exactly the same four factors are in view here: 1. repent, 2. turn again, 3. that sins may be blotted out, and 4. that refreshing from the Lord’s presence would follow. It is universally admitted that 1, 2, and 4, of the above factors in both sequences are synonymous; and, if we had known nothing at all concerning any of these things, the incidence of ‘be baptised’ and ‘turn again’ in exactly corresponding places in these sequences would prove that they mean the same thing.’

“And that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you, even Jesus. He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.” [Acts 3:20-21](#)

The Holy Spirit isn’t finished speaking through Peter yet, because Peter goes on to say that when Jesus’ work in salvation was completed, then God would send Jesus again to reclaim His own, [Acts 3:20](#).

What do ‘send Christ’ and ‘restore all things’ mean? [Acts 3:21](#). Jesus speaks about restoring things, [Matthew 17:11-12](#), so can it be that he is talking about our relationships that need to be restored, as well as our standing before God? Just as in the Garden of Eden in the beginning, when Adam and Eve could stand before God and have perfect relationships till it was destroyed, [Genesis 3:22-24](#). Is it the kind of restoration we are talking about? Until that time when salvation was fully accomplished, as the prophets had foretold, Peter said Jesus would remain in heaven, [Acts 3:21](#).

McGarvey, in his commentary, says the following.

‘A certain amount of work in the saving of men was to be accomplished before his coming. This is indicated by the qualifying remark, ‘whom the heavens must receive until the restoration of all things whereof God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets.’

Dummelow, in his commentary, says the following.

‘It means the restoration of the whole universe to its original and planned perfection ... as in the ‘new heavens and the new earth’” [2 Peter 3:13](#)’.

“For Moses said, ‘The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from among his people.’ Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days. And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, ‘Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.’” [Acts 3:22-25](#)

There are those who will listen and obey, and there are those who will listen and not obey, [Acts 4:1-4](#). We already know that those who obey will go on to live with Christ forever in heaven, but those who don’t obey will not go to heaven. Those who refuse God’s saving grace will be punished, as Moses said.

Peter partially quoting from [Deuteronomy 18:15-19](#), says that as children of Israel, those in Peter's audience should have been aware of the numerous prophecies about the coming Messiah from Samuel, [Acts 3:24](#) / [2 Samuel 7:12-16](#), through to John. There were over three hundred prophecies concerning the Messiah, and Jesus fulfilled them all. Constable, in his commentary, says the following concerning [Acts 3:24](#).

'Samuel announced that David would replace Saul, [1 Samuel 13:14](#) / [1 Samuel 15:28](#) / [1 Samuel 28:17](#) / [1 Samuel 16:13](#), but we have no record that he ever gave an explicitly messianic prophecy. Peter seems to have meant that in announcing David's reign, Samuel was also anticipating the Messiah's reign. The other prophets Peter apparently had in mind were all those who spoke of David's continuing dynastic rule. Peter's statement in this verse, by the way, shows that Joshua did not fulfil Moses' prophecy about the coming prophet.'

The Jews had benefited from God's covenant with Abraham and should also have been familiar with the promise that one day the whole world was going to be blessed through the seed of Abraham, [Acts 3:25](#) / [Genesis 12:3](#) / [Genesis 22:18](#) / [Genesis 26:4](#) / [Genesis 28:14](#).

Paul told the Galatian church that this specifically referred to one son of Abraham, Jesus, [Galatians 3:16](#). The Jews or sons of Abraham were the first to hear the Gospel, just as Christ commanded, [Luke 24:46-48](#) / [Romans 1:16](#). These guys should have known that Jesus was the Messiah. They had been told about the coming of the Messiah, time and time again, through the prophets.

It's very obvious that they thought the Messiah would come and establish a physical kingdom here on earth. But Jesus had come, not to restore a physical kingdom to Israel, but to establish a spiritual kingdom and bring salvation from sin. The fact that the Jews were to be the first to hear the Gospel clearly implies that others would also hear it in the future.

“When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways.” Acts 3:26

Peter left no doubts in these people's minds as to who and why Jesus came. He tells them that Christ was sent to the Jews first, [Romans 1:16](#). The Jews may have been there and killed the Messiah, but we all need to understand that we were there too. He died for our sins. The highest blessing that can be bestowed upon people is to be turned from sin. Sin is the source of all sadness, and if people are turned from that, they truly will be happy. Peter is saying to them and us today that the Messiah had come, and now they might look for happiness, pardon, and mercy through Him.

As the Jews might in Peter's day have had the option to turn from their sins, people today have the choice to turn from their sins. Because Jesus still wants to bless all nations by the Gospel, [Matthew 28:19-20](#) / [Mark 1:15-16](#), which He had Himself preached, and which the apostles preached and we still preach today.

Do you need some time to refresh?

Those times of refreshing are only going to come when we choose to say no to the world and yes to Jesus. It's only when we repent and turn to Jesus in obedience and submit to Him in the waters of baptism that those times of refreshing begin.

CHAPTER 4

INTRODUCTION

“The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. They seized Peter and John, and because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand.” Acts 4:1-4

PETER AND JOHN BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

In the previous chapter, we saw that the apostles Peter and John entered the temple where there was a lame man by the Gate Beautiful, whom they healed. While Peter and John were still preaching, a bunch of men fully armed came into the temple area and arrested them, [Acts 4:1](#) / [2 Timothy 3:12](#). Now, who were these men?

Luke tells us there were priests, the captain of the temple and the Sadducees. We know who the priests were; they were descendants of the tribe of Levi, and they were assigned by God to serve God in the temple, [Exodus 2:1-8](#) / [Exodus 4:14](#) / [Exodus 6:16-26](#) / [Exodus 28:1-4](#) / [Exodus 32:26-29](#).

The Sadducees were proud, secular materialists who denied the existence of a spiritual world, holding that neither angels nor demons existed, denying any such thing as the resurrection, [Acts 23:8](#). They rejected the Old Testament Scriptures, except for the parts of them which had political usefulness, and also refused the traditions of the elders. And over a period of time, through wealth and political power, they had gained control of the religious apparatus which ran the temple, the office of the high priest being regularly filled by this group.

Who was the captain of the temple guard? He belonged to one of the chief-priestly families of the Levites, and in the temple, he ranked next to the high priest. In other words, he was one of the main men with authority in and around the temple area, [Luke 22:4](#) / [Luke 22:52](#).

The Talmud says the following.

‘The captain of the temple, but it is still scanty. In the Kodashim, Middoth, ch. I, pp. 1-5, this man, ‘the officer of the temple mount,’ is said to be in charge of twenty-four watches, or guard posts, located at important spots about the Temple courtyard. In Tamid, ch. I, pp. 1-12, it is said that this officer, second to the high priest, was in charge of three groups of priests who guarded the Chamber of Abtimas, the Chamber of the Spark, and the Chamber of Fire. In addition, he commanded twenty-one groups of Levites who were placed elsewhere, particularly at the five gates.’

Luke tells us the apostles were arrested because they taught the people and preached the resurrection by preaching about Jesus, [Acts 4:2](#). Where are the Pharisees at this time?

We can’t be certain where they were at this point, but perhaps they were absent because the apostles were teaching the resurrection. The Pharisees were the teachers of the law, and they believed in the resurrection, whereas the Sadducees didn’t, [Acts 23:8](#).

What we will see as we go through the Book of Acts is that the Pharisees seem to be sympathetic towards the church, and some of them even obeyed the Gospel, [Acts 5:38-40](#) / [Acts 15:5](#) / [Acts 23:6-9](#).

Luke tells us that it was now evening, and Peter and John apparently having preached for nearly three hours find themselves in jail until the next day, [Acts 4:3](#). I want to raise an important point here, remember when Jesus was on trial, what time of day was it?

[Matthew 26:47-58](#) tells us that it would have been around midnight when Jesus was arrested, and He was hurried to the house of Caiaphas, the high priest, wherein expectation of the capture, a company of chief priests, scribes and elders, members of the Sanhedrin, were already assembled.

The trial of Jesus was illegal because they were supposed to wait until the next day for the trial. But I guess if you have a hidden agenda and you don't want to be reminded to do things right, you will always find a way around it.

The religious leaders had one rule for Jesus and another rule for the apostles, which is a practice that mustn't be allowed to govern the Lord's church, [1 Timothy 5:21](#).

The apostles healed the lame man and then preached the resurrection of Christ, and then they were arrested. Despite their arrest, God caused the preaching of the gospel to bring forth fruit, as Luke reports the number of men who believed came to about five thousand, [Acts 4:4](#) / [Acts 2:41](#).

“The next day, the rulers, elders and teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. Annas, the high priest, was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and the other men of the high priest's family. They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: “By what power or what name did you do this?” Acts 4:5-7

When Peter and John were brought before the Jewish Sanhedrin, the rulers, the elders, and the teachers of the law were in attendance, [Acts 4:5](#). Annas is there, and Caiaphas is there, [Luke 3:2](#), but we know nothing about John and Alexander, [Acts 4:6](#).

This was not a normal courtroom; this was the high court consisting of seventy members, plus the high priest, that oversaw matters concerned with the temple and its worship. It was, in fact, the chief political force among the Jews, [Numbers 11:16-25](#).

Because all these people were in attendance, this tells us that the incident in the temple where they healed the lame man was taken very seriously. And notice also, they never questioned whether or not the miracle took place. They were more concerned about under whose authority it was performed, [Acts 4:7](#) / [Matthew 10:17-20](#).

They ask, ‘By what power or what name did you do this?’ [Acts 4:7](#). This is the same question they asked Jesus, ‘By what power do you do all these miracles?’ [Mark 11:28](#).

Were they interested in truth? No. They are interested in power; they do not care about the man who was healed. Do they want to rejoice along with the others? No.

“Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: “Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. He is “the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.” Acts 4:8-11

Notice Peter is filled with the Holy Spirit, [Acts 4:8](#). How can I be filled with the Holy Spirit? When we read of the spiritual vibrancy in the life of the early church, do you wonder why our life is not like that? How can we live under the Spirit's influence?

Though every believer has been given the Holy Spirit, [Acts 2:38](#) / [Galatians 3:14](#) / [Ephesians 1:13-14](#) / [Romans 8:9](#), not every believer lives a Spirit-filled life. The instruction to ‘be filled with the Spirit’, [Ephesians 5:18](#), was written to those who already had received the Holy Spirit. Now, however, they were being instructed to display the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

SEVERAL POINTS NEED TO BE NOTED

1. The instruction to be filled with the Spirit isn't optional; it's not something we can take or leave. It is imperative!
2. Unlike our conversion, which is unrepeatable, ‘we cannot be born again and again and again’, being filled with the Spirit is a continuous process throughout our lives. We are literally to keep on being filled with the Holy Spirit.

3. Being filled with the Spirit isn't something that automatically happens to us; it's something we're responsible for appropriating as we cooperate with God, who is working in us.

We become filled with the Spirit in the same way one becomes filled with wine, by continually drinking. How this spiritual 'drinking' is done can be seen in two examples given by our Lord.

How do we hunger and thirst for righteousness? Matthew 5:6. We all experience hunger and thirst; even when we are exhausted, we will not rest until we have satisfied our cravings for food and drink. The point Jesus is making is this: we are to pursue righteousness, the doing of the will of God, with the determination of a person pursuing food and drink.

Only in the holy pursuit of God's will can we be satisfied. This is why an appetite must be acquired for spiritual things. This is achieved by exposing ourselves to the will of God through our personal reading of His Word, Bible study and prayer.

The Lord discusses the Spirit-filled life in the Gospel of John, John 7:37-39. But who are the thirsty and how do they drink? The thirsty are those who desire to live for Jesus; they want His will done in their life. They desire to do the will of God on earth as it is done in heaven.

They come to Jesus to 'drink' and from within them flows 'streams of living water'. This refers to the power of the Holy Spirit at work in their lives. And though their intake is small, their output is like streams of living water flowing from them. This is the Spirit giving a super-abundant display of His presence in their lives.

We are filled with the Spirit to the extent that we allow the Spirit to influence our lives. We yield to the Spirit's gentle movement in our hearts. We 'live by the Spirit', we are 'led by the Spirit', we bear 'the fruit of the Spirit', and we 'keep in step with the Spirit'. Galatians 5:16 / Galatians 5:18 / Galatians 5:22-23 / Galatians 5:25.

When we read what the Spirit wrote, hear what the Spirit says and do what the Spirit reveals, we are being filled with the Spirit. Revelation 1:11 / Revelation 2:7 / Colossians 3:16.

How would you know if a person is filled with the Spirit? What would there be about his or her life that would provide confirmation? The answer isn't hard to find.

The early church needed to implement a programme to ensure that the material needs of the saints were being met. Seven men were appointed to oversee this work; they were men 'full of the Spirit,' Acts 6:3-4.

How did the church know which seven to pick? They looked at their manner of life and saw the undeniable evidence of the Spirit's influence in their lives. The Spirit-filled life cannot be concealed.

When you live a Spirit-filled life, 'Christ will dwell in your hearts,' Ephesians 3:17. The word 'dwell' refers to a place of permanent abode as opposed to temporary accommodation. Jesus speaks on the same theme, John 14:23. The Spirit-filled life isn't an ordinary life; it bears all the marks of something extraordinary, something supernatural. It's beyond natural explanation. Every believer should be actively pursuing the Spirit-filled life.

Remember, Jesus promised His apostles that the Holy Spirit would give them words to say when they are before the authorities, Matthew 10:17-19. Peter, full of the Holy Spirit, is defending Christ in front of authorities, and he is saying what the rulers had done was not in accordance with the will of God, you killed Jesus, but God raised him from the dead, Acts 4:8-10. Peter was an in-your-face preacher who just got straight to the point.

Plumtre, in his commentary, says the following.

'A few weeks back, Peter had quailed before the soldiers and servants in the palace of the high priest. But now he stands before the Sanhedrin and speaks in the language of respect, but also that of unflinching boldness.'

Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Barnes truly declared that ‘it is not possible to account for this change except on the supposition that this religion is true.’

Peter, filled with God’s Spirit, tells them it was through Jesus, the very person they had rejected and crucified. It was through Jesus’ Name that the man was made well, and Peter wanted the council and all of Israel to know that profound truth, [Acts 4:10](#).

In fact, to reinforce that truth upon these leaders, he quotes Old Testament scripture, [Acts 4:11](#), and he quotes from [Psalm 118:22](#). He wanted to show the Sanhedrin that they, as the religious builders, had rejected the very stone which was chosen by God to be the head of the corner.

The words of David in his Psalm certainly point to Jesus, the Messiah, the stone who was rejected by the religious leaders in His day, [Isaiah 28:16](#) / [Daniel 2:34](#) / [Matthew 21:42-43](#) / [Mark 12:10-11](#) / [Luke 20:17](#) / [1 Peter 2:4-7](#). Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘It is remarkable how true are the speeches of Peter recorded in Acts are to the epistles credited to this apostle in the New Testament. Peter had been present when the Lord first used this figure of himself, [Matthew 21:42](#), and he developed the idea further in [1 Peter 2:4-6](#).’

Note that the KJV uses the words, has become the ‘head cornerstone’. The head cornerstone was used to set the orientation of the entire building, and from the head cornerstone, the building was erected. This again points to Jesus, who is the head cornerstone of His church, [Matthew 16:18-19](#) / [Ephesians 2:20](#) / [1 Peter 2:7](#).

“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.” Acts 4:12

Hell is not afraid of my name, hell is not afraid of your name, but all of hell is terribly afraid of Jesus’ Name. Because it’s only in Jesus’ Name can a person receive spiritual healing or salvation. That’s a truth that everyone on this planet has to accept or deny, [Romans 14:11](#) / [Philippians 2:10-11](#).

Boice, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Oh, how the world hates such statements! If you want to be laughed at, scorned, hated, even persecuted, testify to the exclusive claims of Jesus Christ.’

“When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realised that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished, and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say. So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together. What are we going to do with these men?” they asked. “Everybody living in Jerusalem knows they have done an outstanding miracle, and we cannot deny it.” Acts 4:13-16

Here are a couple of apostles, not trained or well-schooled by any rabbis or scribes, except the greatest teacher of all, who was Jesus, yet they dared to interpret Scripture with great boldness, [Acts 4:13](#). And because of that boldness in their interpretation of Scripture, the council noted they had been with Jesus, [Acts 4:13](#).

Notice also that we cannot deny the facts. The council could not deny the miracle because the formerly lame man stood before them healed, [Acts 4:14](#) / [Acts 3:2](#). And because they spoke the truth in love, they silenced their enemies. And so, in a state of panic, they ordered the apostles outside while they conferred, [Acts 4:15](#).

What are they going to do? Are they going to kill the healed man and deny the whole thing? No, they couldn’t kill him and deny the miracle because reports of the healing were widespread, [Acts 4:16](#).

Scott, in his commentary, says the following.

‘We do not find that the council gave any reason why the doctrine of Christ must be suppressed; they could not say that it was either false or dangerous, or of any evil tendency; and they were ashamed to own the true reason, i.e., that it testified against their hypocrisy, wickedness and tyranny.’

“But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn these men to speak no longer to anyone in this name.” Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God’s sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.” Acts 4:17-20

They couldn’t disprove Peter’s arguments for the resurrection of Jesus, but they needed to stop the preaching of Jesus before more of the people turned to follow Him, [Acts 4:17](#). So Luke tells us they ended up doing the only thing they could do, threaten them, [Acts 4:18](#).

When we speak in Jesus’ Name, we’re speaking with the authority of Christ Himself. And when people tell us to stop preaching from God’s Word because they find it offensive, the church needs to stand up and say what those apostles said, [Acts 4:19-20](#).

For the apostles, preaching Christ was a matter of life or death, [Philippians 1:21](#). Without life after death, this present life makes no sense, that makes it clear why Peter and John are so bold, they had seen the risen Christ, [Luke 24:36-49](#) / [Acts 1:3](#).

They preached the Gospel because Jesus commanded them to, [Matthew 28:19-20](#) / [Mark 16:15-16](#) / [Acts 1:8](#). Just imagine, if you were to see the risen Christ, what would it do to you?

“After further threats, they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened. For the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old. On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them.” Acts 4:21-23

Just like these religious leaders did in Jesus’ day, they continued to do with the apostles. When Jesus was around, they were always looking for an excuse to take Him and find some fault with Him.

On one of these occasions, Jesus was sharing with the people the parable of the vineyard owner, [Mark 12:1-12](#). The religious leaders knew He was talking about them, but they couldn’t do anything because they were afraid of the people, [Mark 12:12](#).

Peter and John made it clear to them that the Sanhedrin had no authority to revoke a command from God. They told them that they felt compelled, by the power of the things they had witnessed, to proclaim to everyone the good news concerning Jesus the Christ.

And so, because the miracle was such common knowledge and had caused so many people to glorify God, the council had no other alternative but to let the apostles go without any further punishment, [Acts 4:21](#).

The apostles were later going to be arrested and beaten, [Acts 5:17-40](#), and not long after that, Stephen was going to be stoned to death, [Acts 6:8-7:60](#), all because they preached the Gospel.

They simply added a few more threats and let them go rather than risk the people taking the apostles’ side. After all, here was a man who had been lame for forty years but was now walking, [Acts 4:22](#). Peter and John, instead of lying low waiting for the issue to settle, kept the momentum going.

THE BELIEVERS PRAY

“When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. “Sovereign Lord,” they said, “you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: “‘Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand, and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One.’ Indeed, Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.” Acts 4:24-28

The entire group lifted their voices in praise to the Almighty Creator. They just praised God for His providential work in the death of Jesus, [Acts 4:23-24](#). Instead of going into hiding, they recognised that God was with them and no one and nothing was going to stop them from doing what God wanted them to do. Not only did the apostles praise God for what happened, but they also went on to ask God to help them do what He wants them to do, [Ephesians 6:12](#).

Notice the apostles quote David’s words, [Acts 4:25-26](#), from [Psalm 2:1-2](#). In the Bible, people were generally classed as either Jew or Gentile, and so, the nations that conspired were Gentiles, that is, all those nations that weren’t of Israel. Here, we see Luke recording these words where he applies them to the hostility of unbelievers against Christians.

These Gentile nations ‘conspire’, some translations use the word ‘rage’, [Acts 4:25](#). They appear to ‘band together’ against God’s work through His people, but all their plotting is in vain, all their efforts are absolutely useless, [Acts 4:26](#) / [Genesis 11:1-9](#) / [Isaiah 54:17](#) / [Romans 8:31](#).

Notice they go against the Lord and His Anointed, [Acts 4:26](#). When we read these verses, we see this is a clear reference to King Jesus and the church, against which the nations futilely set themselves, [Acts 13:33](#) / [Hebrews 1:5](#) / [Hebrews 5:5](#) / [Matthew 3:17](#) / [Romans 1:4](#) / [Revelation 2:26-27](#) / [Revelation 19:15](#). Jesus, Himself clearly alluded to the teaching of this very Psalm, [Matthew 22:45](#).

Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great, was one who beheaded John the Baptist, [Acts 4:27](#) / [Mark 6:14-29](#).

Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea at the time of Christ’s death, [Acts 4:27](#) / [John 19:16-42](#). The Gentiles were those of Pilate’s council and the Roman soldiers, [John 19:23-24](#).

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘It is evident that what God’s hand and counsel determined before to be done was not that which Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles, (Romans,) and the people of Israel had done and were doing; for, then, their rage and vain counsel would be such as God himself had determined should take place, which is both impious and absurd; but these gathered together to hinder what God had before determined that his Christ or Anointed should perform; and thus the passage is undoubtedly to be understood.’

Notice Luke records that they did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen, [Acts 4:28](#) / [Romans 11:33](#).

Dummelow, in his commentary, says the following.

‘There is a theological difficulty here. God is said to have foreordained the iniquitous proceedings of the scribes and Pharisees who condemned Jesus. The explanation is that God is said to foreordain what he foresees and permits. God permitted the death of Jesus, intending by it to redeem the world, and to destroy the works of the devil, [Acts 2:23](#) / [Acts 3:18](#).’

“Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant, Jesus. After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.” Acts 4:29-31

They asked God to give them all the strength and boldness to preach the truth despite the threats of the Sanhedrin, [Acts 4:29](#). They wanted everyone to know that all authority belongs to Jesus Christ and no one

else, [Matthew 28:18](#). When we recognise and submit to His authority, we will be given what we need most of all at that moment. We will be given the strength and courage to go on.

Every time in the Book of Acts when God's people are persecuted or put on trial, we will always see them coming through those times even bolder than they first went in. We should never underestimate the power of prayer. God will not always send us what we want, but what we need.

They ask God to stretch out His hand to perform healing, signs and wonders through the Name of His holy servant Jesus, [Acts 4:30](#). Notice also that Peter calls Jesus the Lord's holy servant; this is the fourth time up to this point, [Acts 3:13](#) / [Acts 3:26](#) / [Acts 4:27](#) / [Acts 4:30](#).

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘This was a petition that God would continue to perform the great signs and wonders such as the healing of the impotent man; but the apostles accurately read the connection between such signs and the preaching of the word; for, in the previous verse, they had prayed first that they themselves should not flinch in the proclamation of the truth.’

Notice once again, they prayed, and we don't have to wonder what they were praying for because [Acts 4:30](#) tells us. When they had finished praying, the whole meeting place was shaken.

This appears to be God's way of demonstrating that He would answer their prayers. They were once again filled with the Holy Spirit, who enabled them to speak boldly, [Acts 4:31](#) / [Acts 4:8](#)

Ogilvie, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The word boldness means lucid and daring statement. In the Greek the word is parresia, ‘telling it all.’

THE BELIEVERS SHARE THEIR POSSESSIONS

“All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had”. [Acts 4:32](#)

After a time in prison, Peter and John met up with the other believers, and they just thanked God for everything He had done and was doing through His people. They pray even more to God for strength and courage to keep going, and when a church prays together, things are going to happen.

Straight away, Luke records that the church was united in heart and mind, [Acts 4:32](#). This means there was a willingness to share, [Acts 2:44-47](#). One heart means the same desires, and unity has to do with how we respond to each other.

This is what we would call fellowship, ‘koinonia’, which implies giving and receiving, [Acts 2:42](#). Unity has to do with the way we treat each other. Unity has to do with the way we act together. Unity has to do with the love we have for each other.

They were beginning to enjoy a new kind of unity, and this new Christian unity was very evident in the way they readily shared what they had with their fellow believers.

Notice that this time of sharing was voluntary and not forced upon them by some governmental or church order, [Acts 4:32](#). These early Christians began to think radically differently from before about their possessions.

Instead of keeping a tight hold of their own possessions, each Christian thought of his blessings as gifts from God to be used to the benefit of all the brethren, [Galatians 6:10](#) / [James 1:17](#). That attitude of generosity is going to have an impact on the people around them, [2 Corinthians 9:7](#) / [1 Timothy 5:3](#).

Not only will prayer give us one heart and mind of generosity, but it will also have an impact to enhance the power of the preaching of those individuals we help.

“With great power, the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time, those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need. Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet.” Acts 4:33-37

When they shared their possessions, the apostles received strength and courage to continue to preach about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Notice that ‘grace was upon them all’, [Acts 4:33](#).

In other words, they were aware of the grace of God, and so this is why they treated each other gracefully. God’s dealings with us should be shown in the way we treat each other.

Don’t misunderstand what’s happening here; the apostles were not in control of everyone’s properties. The church gave freely because they wanted to help others, [Acts 4:34](#).

Individual believers gave as they could; they didn’t sell everything they possessed, that would be nonsense because that would mean that they would then be in need themselves. But individual believers sold land and brought the money to the apostles to be distributed as needed among the family of God, [Acts 4:35](#).

And apparently, a guy named Joseph, who was a Levite, was well known for such acts of kindness and encouragement, [Acts 4:36-37](#). In fact, he was so well known for them that he was nicknamed Barnabas, or son of Encouragement, by the apostles.

Why is he mentioned here? He is going to be a prominent character later, [Acts 11:24](#) / [Acts 13:1](#) / [Acts 14:14](#) / [Acts 15:12](#). People usually remember us by our actions.

CHAPTER 5

INTRODUCTION

“Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. With his wife’s full knowledge, he kept back part of the money for himself but brought the rest and put it at the apostles’ feet”. Acts 5:1-2

In the previous chapter, Luke spoke about Barnabas, the son of Encouragement, and even today, people remember his name because of what he did to help those in need.

In this chapter, we’re introduced to another couple who will also be remembered in history for all the wrong reasons. They are going to be remembered in history for lying to the Holy Spirit. Note that the word ‘now’ shouldn’t be used at the start of this chapter; it should be the word ‘but’, because it’s used as a contrast to the previous chapter.

In other words, in contrast to those who were blessing others by selling their property to help those in need in Acts 4:33-37, Ananias and Sapphira didn’t really want to help those in need; what they really wanted was to gain a good reputation for themselves. Acts 4:36-37.

Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, sold a piece of land but decided to only lay a portion of the proceeds at the feet of the apostles. We might wonder what was so wrong with this. After all, they sold a piece of land and gave it to the apostles to help those in need?

The problem was one of greed. In **Joshua 7:1**, we find the same word used for Achan's actions, which is also used to describe Ananias and Sapphira's actions. In other words, they 'kept back', something for themselves and in both instances the problems arose because of greed, **Titus 2:10**.

Bruce, in his commentary, says the following.

'The story of Ananias is to the Book of Acts what the story of Achan is to the book of Joshua. In both narratives, an act of deceit interrupts the victorious progress of the people of God.'

Notice that Sapphira was well aware of her husband's actions, **Acts 5:2**.

Bruce, in his commentary, says the following.

'There may indeed be the further implication that Ananias and Sapphira had vowed to give the whole proceeds of the sale to God, but then changed their mind and handed over only part.'

"Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God." Acts 5:3-4

Peter didn't mix his words; he told Ananias that it was Satan who had filled his heart, and later, we will see his wife's heart to lie to the Holy Spirit. In other words, because the apostles were inspired by the Holy Spirit, **1 Corinthians 12:8**, pretending to give 'all the money' from the sale of the land to the apostles was the equivalent of lying to the Spirit.

There's no question about how Peter saw the Holy Spirit. He believed the Holy Spirit was a Person, because one can only lie to a person. Notice also that he believed the Holy Spirit is God, **Acts 5:4**.

Interestingly, Peter asks him the question, 'What made you think of doing such a thing?' We may never know why Ananias did this; maybe he was trying to test the credibility of the apostles' speech.

After all, they claimed to be speaking through the Spirit, and if the apostles failed to see through this trick, their very words would come into question. Whatever the reason, I believe it was greed.

Remember that the amount of the gift was not the problem, as Peter said. The land was theirs to do with as they pleased, but the problem started when he tried to deceive God as to the size of the gift. And it was a problem that was going to be fatal for Ananias and later for his wife, Sapphira.

"When Ananias heard this, he fell and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. Then the young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him." Acts 5:5-6

Most people have lied at some point in their lives, even Christians. We can lie to our friends and family, and we would be unaware of it, but we cannot lie to God and expect to get away with it, **Galatians 6:7**.

Lying to God comes in several different ways; when we lie to our fellow brothers or sisters in Christ, we are actually lying to God. Ananias, after hearing Peter's words, fell down dead, and this resulted in great fear coming upon all who heard about the incident. And so some young men wrapped Ananias' body and took it out to be buried.

Morgan, in his commentary, says the following.

'Observe that Peter said no word to Ananias about his death. The sentence was not calling down a curse upon a man at the caprice of an ecclesiastical official. The death of Ananias was the act of God.'

"About three hours later, his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?" "Yes," she said, "that is the price." Peter said to her, "How could you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry

you out also.” At that moment, she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband. Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.” Acts 5:7-11

Ananias is dead and buried, but his wife, Sapphira, has no idea what has happened to him, and so she comes along three hours later and tells Peter the same lie. Remember, Peter is not a mind reader; he’s inspired by the Holy Spirit, 2 Chronicles 6:30-31.

Peter asked Sapphira if they had sold the land for the amount Ananias had laid at the apostles’ feet. When she said that the amount named was correct, Peter knew they had conspired to deceive or test the Spirit of the Lord, Acts 5:9, who is also described in this story as the Holy Spirit, Acts 5:3, and God, Acts 5:4.

Peter gave her plenty of opportunities to confess her sins to God and to him; that’s why he asked her why they had taken this action and told her the men who had buried her husband’s body would also bury her, Acts 5:9.

And so, she too fell down at Peter’s feet, died and was carried out by the same young men to be buried beside her husband, Acts 5:10. For Ananias and Sapphira, this was certainly a sin which led to death, 1 John 1:5-2:1 / 1 John 5:16-17.

Ironically, the name Ananias means God is Gracious in Hebrew, and the name Sapphira means Beautiful in Aramaic. There was certainly nothing gracious or beautiful about their actions.

This event sent a strong message through the church and an even stronger message to those in the surrounding areas. The message was fear, not only because of the two deaths, but also because of God’s ability to know the intents of the hearts of the conspiring couple, Acts 5:11.

Note, in the Book of Acts, the word, ‘church,’ ekklesia, is used for the first time here, Acts 5:11. Fear in the world’s eyes is always seen as a bad thing, but the fear we read of here is a good fear. In fact, on this occasion, it did four things: it united, divided, brought attention to Christ, and brought new believers.

THE APOSTLES HEAL MANY

“The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon’s Colonnade. No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people. Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number.” Acts 5:12-14

God continued to work miracles through the inspired apostles, and four things happened, Acts 4:30. It united because the church continued to assemble on Solomon’s porch. It divides because although those outside of the church had been moved to fear, they did not dare to join the number of believers.

It brings attention because those outside the church held the Christians in high esteem, and increasing numbers of those who believed in Jesus were added to the Lord. And finally, it brings new believers.

The fear, signs, miracles and wonders were done to get people’s attention to the Word of God. In other words, God doesn’t have to speak to us in various ways as He did before; He speaks to us through His word, Hebrews 1:1-2. That’s why these things don’t happen today, because we have the complete and final revelation from God in the form of His Word, Jude 3. We don’t live by sight, we live by faith, Hebrews 11:1.

After they performed the miracles, the apostles continued to preach about Jesus’ rising from the dead and look at what happened. They got people’s attention, and they are still getting people’s attention.

“As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter’s shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by evil spirits, and all of them were healed.” Acts 5:15-16

People were so impressed with the way God worked through the apostles that they brought their sick out into the streets. There was absolutely no misunderstanding about what was going on here in Jerusalem. Peter could see the people and stop to heal them as he passed by, or, at least, his shadow would fall on them, **Acts 3:12-16**.

Whether they were actually healed by the shadow of Peter passing over them, we cannot tell from the text. Please note that the apostles were not hoaxers; if they were, people would never have come.

But they did come, they even came from surrounding towns, bringing those who were sick or possessed by an evil spirit. All were healed by the power of God working through the apostles.

Fear really is a good thing; in fact, fearing God and keeping His commandments is all God wants from everyone, **Ecclesiastes 12:13**. We have to fear God and do His will now, whilst we still have life in these bodies, **Hebrews 10:26-27**.

THE APOSTLES PERSECUTED

“Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail”. **Acts 5:17-18**

After the amazing and powerful events we learned about where Ananias and Saphira lied to God, and a great fear came over the Lord’s church and those who were not yet Christians, **Acts 5:11**.

God added to their number, **Acts 5:14**, and God, through the apostles, was getting people’s attention not just in Jerusalem but from afar, **Acts 1:8 / Acts 8:1 / Acts 12:1-2**. It should be of no surprise that others are becoming jealous because of the attention the apostles were receiving.

The apostles had been warned before not to preach in Jesus’ Name, **Acts 4:18**, but despite that earlier warning, they continued preaching in the Name of Jesus. They are preaching the story of Jesus and His resurrection, but this teaching was totally contrary to the teaching of the Sadducees because they didn’t believe in the resurrection, **Matthew 22:23-46 / Acts 23:8**.

However, when God has a plan and mission in mind, no one and nothing is going to keep God from doing His mission, and the apostles being arrested and put in jail wasn’t going to stop His mission from going forward, **Acts 4:3**.

“But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out.” Go, stand in the temple courts,” he said, “and tell the people the full message of this new life.” At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people”. **Acts 5:19-21**

When Jesus commanded His apostles to go into all the world and preach the good news, **Matthew 28:18-20 / Acts 1:8 / Acts 8:1 / Acts 12:1-2**, this also implies that He will help make sure His disciples could do just that.

And when God saw that His apostles were in prison again, **Acts 4:3**, He sent a messenger to release the apostles, **Hebrews 1:14**, and commanded them to go to the temple and preach the words which give eternal life, **Acts 5:19-20**.

Hughes, in his commentary, says the following.

‘There is some divine humour here, too, because the Sadducees, **Acts 5:17**, did not believe in angels.’

In other words, God is more powerful than any earthly authority, and when God says ‘go,’ he means ‘go,’ but He will also give us the means to go. That’s why He sent an angel to the apostles to free them to preach in the temple. That’s

why He sent Jonah a great fish to get him to Nineveh. **Jonah 1:4-13**. That's why He sent a great storm for Paul to get him to Rome, **Acts 27:1-44**.

In other words, if God wants us to take the Gospel to others, He will give us the means to do that. The apostles have now played their God sent get out of jail free card and are preaching in the temple. And at roughly the same time, the high priest and his friends are coming together to discuss what to do with the apostles.

“When the high priest and his associates arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin, the full assembly of the elders of Israel, and sent to the jail for the apostles. But on arriving at the jail, the officers did not find them there. So they went back and reported, “We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside.” **Acts 5:19-23**

Luke tells us that some officers went to get the apostles but discovered that they had gone, even though some guards were still there and the jail was still securely locked. And so they went back to those who had gathered and told them they had gone. What was going through the minds of those gathered there? The apostles being miraculously freed from prison wasn't because of some great feat of escapology.

They weren't another bunch of deceivers who used illusions. They were apostles of Christ and God, through the means of an angel, set them free to continue the preaching of Christ and His resurrection. Despite such a clear sign that God was with the apostles, the high priest and those allied with him wondered what would happen.

“On hearing this report, the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were puzzled, wondering what would come of this. Then someone came and said, “Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people.” At that, the captain went with his officers and brought the apostles. They did not use force, because they feared that the people would stone them. Having brought the apostles, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. “We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name,” he said. Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood.” **Acts 5:24-28**

It must have been a shock for the council to learn that the men they had charged not to preach in the name of Jesus, **Acts 4:18**, were preaching in the temple, **Acts 4:19-20**. And here, we learn that even jealous people need to know their limits. Even jealous people know what and what not to do when there's a crowd around.

The captain and his officers brought them back without using any force because they feared the common people who sympathised with the apostles, and they feared the people would stone them, that is, the officials.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The popularity of the new faith was such, at the moment, that the Sadducean priests simply did not dare to arouse the anger of the Jerusalem mob. It is not to be thought that the Christians would have stoned the officers, although some of the new converts might have joined in such a resistance, but rather that the non-Christians whose sympathies were all with the disciples might have broken into violence if provoked.’

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The apostles were so popular with the people that the captain and his temple police had to be very careful not to create the impression that they were going to harm the apostles. The apostles had become local heroes, as Jesus had been in the eyes of many. Earlier, Israel's leaders had wanted to arrest Jesus but were careful about how they did so because they feared the reaction of the people,’ **Luke 20:19 / Luke 22:2**.’

It wasn't all that long ago when Jesus was crucified that these very people, along with a mob, were very willing to have the blood of Jesus on their own hands, **Matthew 27:24-25 / Acts 2:23**.

“Peter and the other apostles replied: “We must obey God rather than men!” The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead, whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and

Saviour that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.” Acts 5:29-32

Peter’s and the other apostles’ answer to the Sanhedrin carries profound implications for each generation of Christians. Clearly, no law was considered by the apostles to be above God’s law. After all, the limit of the Sadducees’ authority could be seen in the fact that they had crucified Jesus, and God had raised Him up from the grave.

Who has the greater authority? God or man? The apostles said God had now seated Jesus on the throne as Ruler and Saviour, **Acts 3:15**. The Lord had been empowered by His Father to give repentance leading to the forgiveness of sins to all of Israel.

Notice the KJV uses the word ‘tree’, **Acts 5:30**. This is an allusion to **Deuteronomy 21:22-23**, where it says that a person hanged from a tree is cursed by God. Two times in Acts, **Acts 5:30** / **Acts 10:39**, Jesus’ death is significantly called ‘hanging on a tree.’

The twelve apostles stood as witnesses of God’s work, and the Holy Spirit confirmed the truthfulness of the events they related through the miracles He enabled them to perform. It takes courage to stand up and obey God because when we stand up and put God first, people are going to get upset and angry with us.

“When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death. But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honoured by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while. Then he addressed them: “Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men. Some time ago, Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing. After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered”. Acts 5:33-37

Peter’s accusation of the council of murdering Jesus enraged them to the point of them being prepared to murder the apostles as well. But as angry as they were, they couldn’t take such action without the support of the Pharisaic members of the court.

Remember, the Pharisees were in the minority, but they commanded much more popular respect than the Sadducees did. There were two schools of thought for the Jews, the school of Hillel, who was the grandfather of Gamaliel and the school of Shammai, but both were both Rabbis.

Those of Hillel would listen, but those of Shammai were more legalistic. Gamaliel was highly respected; he was a member of the Sanhedrin and, as a Pharisee, **Acts 5:17**, he believed in the idea of resurrection. The apostle Paul was taught by him, **Acts 22:3**.

And so, when Gamaliel, a highly respected teacher from among the Pharisees, rose to speak and asked for the apostles to be put outside, his words were instantly paid attention to. Basically, Gamaliel warned the council against the actions they were thinking about taking against the apostles.

And so he reminds them of two men, Theudas and Judas, who both claimed to be someone special and had led men in a rebellion. They had both been killed, and those who followed them were scattered, and both rebellions came to nothing. But it seems, for the moment at least, that these religious leaders are beginning to listen to wisdom.

Josephus, the Jewish historian, mentioned a Theudas who led a rebellion, but at a later point than this. It could be that Josephus had his dates mixed up or that this was a different Theudas because it was a common name. Josephus did describe a Judas of Galilee (*Antiquities*, 18.1.1,2,6 and 20.5.2) who may be the same one mentioned here.

“Therefore, in the present case, I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.” Acts 5:37-39

When God has a plan, God has a plan, and we will know what His plan is sooner or later. If their actions were truly directed by God, the council could not stop them, and they would be found in the unenviable position of opposing God Himself.

Here is a man who recognises that if God has a mission and plan, nothing and no one could stop it from happening. After hearing Gamaliel's advice, the council decided to take it.

“His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus and let them go. The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.” Acts 5:40-41

After being flogged, the religious leaders let them go again with yet another warning not to preach in Jesus' Name. They were flogged with leather whips; they received thirty-nine lashes, there were thirteen separate strands of leather straps, and they usually had a bone attached to cause more damage. This means they were lashed three times, **Deuteronomy 25:3 / Acts 22:19 / 2 Corinthians 11:24**.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘This flogging was for disobeying their former order to stop preaching, **Acts 4:18**. This is the first instance of Christians receiving a physical beating for witnessing that Luke recorded in Acts. The rulers also threatened the apostles again and then released them, cf. **Acts 4:21**. The official ban against preaching in Jesus' name remained in force.’

Notice their response after being flogged and told off, the response of the apostles after being beaten and coming so close to being killed is remarkable. They rejoiced because they counted themselves worthy to suffer for Jesus' Name's sake, **Acts 5:41**.

Those first believers turned to Christ with the full understanding that they were supporting an unpopular cause that could cost them everything, **Matthew 10:17 / Matthew 10:22**.

Shortly after Pentecost, some were jailed, many lost all their earthly goods, a few were slain, and hundreds were ‘scattered abroad.’ They could have escaped all this by simply denying their faith and turning back to the world. This they steadfastly refused to do, **2 Timothy 3:12 / 1 Peter 4:14-16 / James 1:2-4**.

“Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.” Acts 5:42

The apostles were determined to continue to preach the Good News, that Jesus is the Christ, **Acts 28:31**, not only in the temple courts but from house to house, **Acts 2:46**.

The Gospel that we proclaim is as simple as we want it to be, and when people hear nothing but bad news all day long, give them some good news. This is what the apostles did: they told them that Jesus is the Christ and He came to die by crucifixion so that He could give us life to the full, even unto eternity.

God had a mission for the apostles, and He has a mission for every one of us, **1 Corinthians 1:20-25**. And that mission is to preach Christ crucified to those we find within our own personal lives.

CHAPTER 6

INTRODUCTION

“In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food”. Acts 6:1

Neglect is a universal problem, and in this chapter, we read about some widows who were being neglected. In Acts 4:32-37, Luke told Theophilus that various people sold some of their possessions and laid the money at the feet of the apostles. And then he further reported that the money was distributed among the brethren according to need. And so what Luke is doing here is reporting some complaints from a group of Jewish Christians called Hellenists. The Hellenists are likely to be converts from among the Jews who had been scattered throughout the world and now spoke Greek and followed the customs of those using the same language.

The Grecians were born of Jewish parents outside Palestine and spoke Greek, and they would have used the Septuagint. They were influenced by other aspects of Greek culture.

Hebraic Jews were born in Palestine and spoke Hebrew, **Philippians 3:5**. Generally, the Grecian Jews would look down on others. The twelve apostles were Hebraic Jews.

The Grecian Jews complained, **Philippians 2:14 / 1 Corinthians 10:10**, because they felt that their widows were not being cared for as well as the widows of the Hebrews, or those who spoke Aramaic, in the daily distribution, or serving of tables, **1 Timothy 5:3-16**.

Elam, in his commentary, says the following.

‘There may be only two classes in the church, namely, the givers and the receivers. Each one belongs to one of these classes. If one is unable to give, that one is in the class of receivers and needs to be given to.’

We don’t know how the charge against them came about, but what was important was the more serious issue of unity in the young church.

THE CHOOSING OF THE SEVEN

“So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.” Acts 6:2-4

When the twelve, which would have included Matthias, **Acts 1:26**, said, ‘it would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables’, **Acts 6:2**.

They weren’t suggesting for one minute that serving tables was beneath them; that’s not what they are saying. They are saying that they have the Lord’s work to do, they have some preaching and teaching to get on with, because that’s why they were called to be apostles.

So how were they going to solve this widow neglect problem? Did they get someone else in from a nearby congregation to deal with their problems? No! Did they choose the most popular people within their own numbers to deal with the problems? No!

The church chose men from among themselves, men that they already knew, men who knew what it meant to serve. They directed the members of the congregation to look among their own number to find seven men qualified to carry out this important task, **Acts 6:3**.

When the apostles said to the church that the men they chose from amongst themselves needed to meet a certain criterion, Luke tells us that these men had to be ‘full of the Holy Spirit’, **Acts 6:3**, which means their lives should be

displaying fully the fruit of the Spirit, **Galatians 5:22-26**. The apostles were looking for seven men who displayed this fruit in their everyday lives.

These men also needed to be ‘full of wisdom’, **Acts 6:3**. Wisdom isn’t just knowing right from wrong, but it also involves doing what is right. There is no wisdom in just knowing right from wrong if we continuously choose the wrong direction. Wisdom is knowing and doing the right thing.

These men needed to know how best to deal with the distribution of food to the widows in question. In other words, they needed to be spiritually minded and practically minded; they needed skills in the management of affairs.

And so the apostles planned to appoint the seven selected to attend to this important matter, so that they could continue to focus on prayer and ministering to others with the Word of God, **Acts 6:4**.

“This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith”. **Acts 6:5-7**

With the requirements of men who were to be ‘full of the Spirit and wisdom’, **Acts 6:3**, the whole multitude of believers set about the task of selecting men so qualified.

They chose Stephen, Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, who, Luke tells us, was a proselyte from Antioch. These people were all Greek Jews.

STEPHEN

Stephen was a man he was man ‘full of the Spirit and wisdom’, **Acts 6:3**, and a man full of faith, **Acts 6:5**. He went on to perform various wonders and signs, **Acts 6:8**. He knew the Scriptures very well, **Acts 6:9-10**. He didn’t back down when confronted by those who disagreed with the truth, **Acts 6:11-15**.

He wasn’t afraid to share the truth with a large, hostile audience, **Acts 7**. He received the strength he needed to stand firm under the most extreme persecution one could suffer as a Christian, **Acts 7:54-60**. He, like Jesus just before He died, asked God to receive his spirit and forgive those who were killing him, **Luke 23:46 / Luke 23:34 / Acts 6:60**.

PHILIP

Philip was a man ‘full of the Spirit and wisdom’, **Acts 6:3**. He had four unmarried daughters who had the gift of prophecy, **Acts 21:8-9**. Philip wanted to share the Good News with anyone who would listen, **Acts 8:1**.

He worked in Samaria as an evangelist for a while, **Acts 8:5-12**, and even shared the Gospel with the Ethiopian eunuch, **Acts 8:26-39**. After baptising the Eunuch, the Holy Spirit took Philip to a place called Azotus, where he continued to preach the gospel, **Acts 8:40**.

A few years later, around twenty years later, Philip is mentioned again, still in Caesarea, **Acts 21:8-9**. Paul, Luke and others were travelling to Jerusalem, and they stopped at Philip’s home in Caesarea. That is the last time the Bible mentions the evangelist Philip.

PROCORUS

We know nothing about Procorus, except that he was a man ‘full of the Spirit and wisdom’, Acts 6:3. Tradition says that he was one of the seventy-two sent out by Jesus in Luke 10:1, that he became bishop of Nicomedia, and that he died a martyr at Antioch.

NICANOR

We know nothing about Nicanor, except that he was a man ‘full of the Spirit and wisdom’, Acts 6:3.

TIMON

We know nothing about Timon, except that he was a man ‘full of the Spirit and wisdom’, Acts 6:3.

PARMENAS

We know nothing about Parmenas, except that he was a man ‘full of the Spirit and wisdom’, Acts 6:3. Tradition says that he was martyred at Philippi, in the reign of Trajan.

NICOLAS

We know Nicolas was a man ‘full of the Spirit and wisdom’, Acts 6:3. He was from Antioch and a convert to Judaism, Acts 6:5. Traditionally, Antioch was Luke’s hometown, and tradition also links this Nicolas with the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, Revelation 2:6 / Revelation 2:15, but there is no solid evidence to support it.

WERE THESE MEN DEACONS?

The Biblical role of deacons is to take care of the physical and logistical needs of the church so that the elders can concentrate on their primary calling, Ephesians 4:11 / 1 Timothy 3:2 / 1 Timothy 5:17 / Titus 1:9 / Hebrews 13:17. This distinction is based on the pattern found in Acts 6:1-6. The apostles were devoted ‘to prayer and to the ministry of the word’ Acts 6:4.

Since this was their primary calling, seven men were chosen to handle more practical matters in order to allow the apostles the freedom to continue with their work.

This division of labour is similar to what we see with the offices of elder and deacon. Like the apostles, the elders' primary role is one of preaching the Word of God. Like the seven, deacons serve the congregation in whatever practical needs may arise.

For a man to serve as a deacon in the Lord's church, he must meet the qualifications given by the Holy Spirit, **1 Timothy 3:8-13**. The word 'deacon' simply means servant, and although the seven chosen men are not 'qualified' as deacons, they were certainly servants.

The seven were then brought before the apostles, who laid their hands on them, but notice an important event that took place before the apostles laid their hands on them.

The text says, 'they prayed first', **Acts 6:6**. The apostles laid their hands on them after going to God in prayer, **Acts 6:6**. In other words, some people try to deal with the problem first and then pray to God about the problem. We all need to get into the habit of praying first to God and asking for His guidance and approval before we move on. It is an essential practice for all Christians to approach God about any matter they are about to undertake, especially when church problems are involved.

Notice another important point here: it was the apostles who laid their hands on the seven men chosen, **Acts 6:6**. The laying on of hands is an interesting study in the Bible, and it was done for one of two reasons.

The apostle Paul wrote a letter to a young man named Timothy, and Paul says to him in **1 Timothy 4:14**, 'neglect not the gift that is in thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery.' KJV.

The word 'presbytery' is another word for elders. But notice the word Paul uses, he uses the word, 'with'. But he uses the word 'with' in the sense of signifying attending circumstances or accompanied.

In other words, Paul is telling us that he, an apostle, imparted the miraculous gift to Timothy. But at the same time, the eldership laid their hands on Timothy 'with' Paul to indicate their simultaneous support and accompanying commendation. And that's what's going on here, the apostles were showing their support and approval for the seven, **Acts 6:6**.

But at the same time, they were passing on miraculous gifts, **Acts 6:6**. Very often, people overlook the fact that every person who had miraculous gifts in the Book of Acts received these gifts by the laying on of the apostle's hands. The Philip mentioned here, **Acts 6:5**, is a perfect example.

When we read **Acts 8:14-21**, we read that Simon the sorcerer, in his infinite wisdom, wanted this gift so much that he was even willing to pay money for it, but notice the text clearly tells us that the apostles Peter and John laid their hands on them, **Acts 8:17**.

The text clearly tells us that Simon saw how the gift was given through the apostles laying on their hands, **Acts 8:18-19**. There's no arguing with scripture here about how the Christians in Samaria received the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit. We might ask, how did Philip get this gift?

Because the text says that Philip had the ability to perform miraculous signs, **Acts 8:6** / **Acts 8:13**. How did he receive this gift? His gift was given to him by the apostles. He got the gift through the laying on of the apostle's hands, which is what we read in **Acts 6:6**.

The first Christians in Ephesus were enabled to speak in tongues when the apostle Paul laid his hands on them, **Acts 19:6**. The reason I mentioned this is that nowhere in the Bible does it say that anyone else had the capability to pass on these gifts. When the apostles died, there was no one else to pass on these gifts.

When those who possessed these miraculous gifts through the laying on of the apostle's hands died, all the miraculous capabilities of the first-century church died with them, **1 Corinthians 13:8-13**. Only the apostles had the ability to impart to others the ability to perform miracles.

Because the problem of neglect was handled with wisdom and Spirit-guided, the result was further growth in the church through the spreading of the word of God, **Acts 6:7**. In fact, the number of Christ's followers was multiplied. Luke told Theophilus that even a large number of priests obeyed the faith, **Acts 6:7**.

When we finally learn to deal with church problems using God's wisdom and listening to the Holy Spirit's guidance, instead of our own wisdom, God will bless our efforts and add to His number.

STEPHEN SEIZED

“Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people. Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)-Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia. These men began to argue with Stephen, but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke”. Acts 6:8-10

Stephen is described as a man full of God's grace, **Acts 4:33**, and power, **Acts 2:22 / Acts 4:33**. He is also full of the Spirit and faith, **Acts 6:3 / Acts 6:5**. Remember the miracles that Stephen performed could not be accomplished without the laying on of the apostles' hands, **Acts 6:6**.

The miracles that Stephen performed did exactly what they were designed to do. They attracted the attention of people, in this case, it was the attention of the synagogue, which was comprised of people from among the Freedmen, or freed slaves, **Acts 6:9**.

People came from various cities outside of Palestine to attend the synagogue, and since Cilicia, where Tarsus is located, is specifically mentioned, it may be that Paul attended this synagogue. There were Jews from Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia and Asia, **Acts 6:9**. Those who attended the Synagogue of the Freedmen were considered very religious.

Marshall, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The Freedmen were Roman prisoners (or the descendants of such prisoners) who had later been granted their freedom. We know that a considerable number of Jews were taken prisoner by the Roman general Pompey and later released in Rome, and it is possible that these are meant here.’

Some of those who were in attendance confronted Stephen and began to debate with him concerning his teaching. But when God is our guide and His word is our wisdom, people can't argue against such wisdom, **Proverbs 17:24 / James 1:5**. They argue with Stephen and his arguments, but couldn't win because his wisdom came from God himself, **Luke 21:15 / Acts 6:10**.

“Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, “We have heard Stephen speak words of blasphemy against Moses and against God.” So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. They produced false witnesses, who testified, “This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us.” Acts 6:11-14

Luke tells us that certain men in the Synagogue bribed other men to accuse Stephen of blasphemy. On this occasion, he was accusing him of speaking against God's words as delivered by Moses, **Matthew 26:59-61 / Acts 6:11**.

Notice they stirred up the people, the elders and the teachers of the law, **Acts 2:47 / Acts 5:26 / Acts 6:12**. All the way through Jesus' earthly ministry, the so-called leaders were looking for ways to trap Jesus and persecute Him because He spoke the truth.

We saw Peter and John thrown into jail and persecuted by the so-called religious leaders in **Acts 4** because they spoke the truth. And here, we see Stephen being persecuted because he spoke the truth.

To understand why they were upset, we need to put ourselves in the mindset of the religious leaders. One of the reasons they were so upset with Stephen, one of the reasons they even went to the extent of bribing false witnesses, was because Stephen told them that God, through the resurrected Christ, whom they had crucified not so long ago, has now provided a new sacrificial system, **Hebrews 7:27**.

So what Stephen meant when he said that Jesus ‘will destroy’ the temple, **John 2:19-22 / Acts 6:14**, is that, just as Jesus took away the basis of the old system on the cross, so now He will go on to dismantle its practices until it is no more. In other words, Stephen told them that the temple is done for.

Bruce, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Whatever form of words Stephen used which gave rise to the accusation that he said Jesus would destroy the temple, he certainly grasped and expounded the inner meaning of Jesus’ own words.’

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The false testimony against Stephen was that he was saying things about the temple and the Mosaic Law that the Jews regarded as untrue and unpatriotic. cf. **Matthew 26:59-61**. Stephen appeared to be challenging the authority of the Pharisees, the Mosaic Law, and a major teaching of the Sadducees, namely, the importance of the temple. He was evidently saying the same things Jesus had said, cf. **Matthew 5:21-48 / Matthew 12:6 / Matthew 24:1-2 / Mark 14:58 / John 2:19-21**.’

Jesus has destroyed it and will destroy it until it is clear to all that He alone is the One and Only sacrifice for sins, the One and Only high priest to God, and the One and Only habitation of the fullness of the glory of God.

Stephen told them the time was coming when they were going to lose their jobs and their livelihoods because the temple would soon be destroyed, **Matthew 22:7 / Matthew 24:1-35**, which we know happened in AD 70.

But the truth of the matter is, if these leaders had read and understood the prophets, especially Jeremiah, they should have been welcoming the end of the Jewish sacrificial system because God told them it was coming, **Jeremiah 31:31-34**.

Jesus was so right about these people when He said they hear but never understand, they see but never perceive, **Matthew 13:14-15**. God sacrificed His one and only Son, Jesus Christ, on Calvary’s cross and shed His blood once and for all to pay for our sins.

Because His sacrifice and His blood could do something that no other blood or no temple sacrificial system could ever do, that is, cleanse our hearts and minds of sinfulness, **Hebrews 9:13-14**.

“All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel”. **Acts 6:15**

Everyone in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen and saw that his face was like that of an angel. In **Exodus 34:29-35**, the writer tells us that Moses’ face shone after he had been with the Lord; his face was so bright that people could not look directly at him.

Luke tells us that Stephen’s face was like that, like an angel’s face. A face like an angel implies innocence; it implies being at peace with God and walking with God. Sadly, there should be no chapter break here, so please keep that in mind as we enter the next chapter.

CHAPTER 7

INTRODUCTION

“Then the high priest asked him, “Are these charges true?” Acts 7:1

This chapter is a continuation of the previous chapter. Despite Stephen’s appearance, Acts 6:15, the high priest asked him if the accusations of blasphemy, which had been brought against him, were true, Acts 6:11-14. Caiaphas was probably the high priest at the time; he is the same person who tried Jesus, Matthew 26:57.

He tries to discredit Stephen in legal terms. Jesus was quiet at His trial, and Stephen was the opposite. And so, in response, Stephen is about to give a history lesson about God’s dealings with His people. Stephen is putting them in the position of being accused.

When they rejected the Messiah, they were doing what their ancestors had always done. If we want to understand the New Testament, we need to understand what God was doing in the Old Testament.

These people are accusing Stephen of blasphemy, an offence which is punishable by being stoned to death, Leviticus 24:10-23, and so, he gives those standing in the Sanhedrin a Jewish history lesson.

Bruce, in his commentary, gives the following useful outline of Stephen’s speech.

‘Stephen’s historical survey reviews the history of the nation from the call of Abraham to the building of Solomon’s temple. It concentrates on three main topics: (i) the patriarchal period, Acts 7:2-16; (ii) Moses and the law, Acts 7:17-43; (iii) the tabernacle and the temple, Acts 7:44-50. The first of the three sections of this speech is an introduction to the central themes; the second deals with the charge of blasphemy against Moses, the third with the charge of blasphemy against God.’

STEPHEN’S SPEECH TO THE SANHEDRIN

‘To this he replied: “Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Harran. ‘Leave your country and your people,’ God said, ‘and go to the land I will show you. So he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Harran. After the death of his father, God sent him to this land where you are now living.’ Acts 7:2-4

Stephen begins his history lesson with God’s dealings with Abraham and his children, Genesis 12:1-9. He reminds the council of Abraham’s call to leave the country of his people, which was first received in Ur of the Chaldees and renewed in Haran after his father’s death.

Mesopotamia, Acts 7:2, means the land between the rivers Tigris and the Euphrates and at the bottom, there was Ur. Genesis tells us that Abraham was called out of Haran, Genesis 12:5. God called Abraham, who was a nobody, and he was a Gentile.

According to Genesis 11:26 and Genesis 11:32, Terah was seventy years old when Abraham was born, and he died at the age of two hundred and five years old in Haran. In Genesis 12:4, we read that Abraham was seventy five years old when he left Haran.

This would mean that Abraham left when Terah was one hundred and seventy five years old, which would be sixty years ‘before’ he died and not ‘after, as Stephen tells us.

Since Philo of Alexandria, who was a Hellenistic Jewish philosopher, agrees with Stephen that Abraham left Haran ‘after’ Terah’s death and since the Samaritan version of Genesis gives the age of Terah as one hundred and forty-five

years old when he died, it is clear that Stephen is following a variant tradition of the text of Genesis. Luke usually follows the LXX. This may tell us that Luke was following a source and not the one composing the speech.

Some people believe because of Genesis 11:31-12:1, that God's command to Abraham was given to him at Haran, not Ur. But Genesis 12:1 can also suggest that what he told him in Haran was actually a confirmation of what he had already said to him in Ur. So Abraham left Ur and settled in Haran.

The point that Stephen is trying to make here is that Abraham moved, under God's direction, to the land of Canaan, Acts 7:3-4. In other words, this wasn't Abraham's own idea to get up and go; this was God's plan for the future of the Jews, and God was going to direct them.

'He gave him no inheritance here, not even enough ground to set his foot on. But God promised him that he and his descendants after him would possess the land, even though at that time Abraham had no child. God spoke to him in this way: 'For four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves,' God said, 'and afterward they will come out of that country and worship me in this place.' Then he gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision. And Abraham became the father of Isaac and circumcised him eight days after his birth. Later, Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob became the father of the twelve patriarchs.' Acts 7:5-8

Stephen continues to speak about what God said to Abraham.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following concerning Acts 7:5.

'The gift was not to Abraham personally, but to him as the founder and representative of the nation.' The only part of Palestine that Abraham ever owned was the cave of Machpelah, which he purchased for a grave.'

Note the actual length of their stay in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years, but Stephen rounded it off to four hundred, Acts 7:7, just as God had in Genesis 15:13-14.

Again, Stephen wanted to let them know that the time the Jews were slaves in Egypt was set to the exact date by God, Exodus 12:40-42. Problems come from the four-hundred-year statement, as Exodus 12:40, and Galatians 3:17, tell us it was actually four hundred and thirty years, but Stephen is following what it says in Genesis 15:13.

The statement of four hundred years is just a round figure. Even though God did not give Abraham an inheritance in the Promised Land, Acts 7:5, he did promise to give him a son, Genesis 17:15-17, and to give the land of Canaan to his descendants, Genesis 17:9-14.

And so what Stephen is doing here is showing how God told Abraham He would judge the nation of Egypt and bring His people out to serve Him in the land of promise at the end of the appointed time, Acts 7:6-7.

It was after making those significant promises to Abraham that God instituted circumcision as a part sign of the covenant between Abraham and his descendants, Acts 7:8. Abraham was circumcised after he received the promises, Genesis 17.

"Because the patriarchs were jealous of Joseph, they sold him as a slave into Egypt. But God was with him and rescued him from all his troubles. He gave Joseph wisdom and enabled him to gain the goodwill of Pharaoh king of Egypt. So Pharaoh made him ruler over Egypt and all his palace. "Then a famine struck all Egypt and Canaan, bringing great suffering, and our ancestors could not find food. When Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our forefathers on their first visit. On their second visit, Joseph told his brothers who he was, and Pharaoh learned about Joseph's family. After this, Joseph sent for his father Jacob and his whole family, seventy-five in all. Then Jacob went down to Egypt, where he and our ancestors died. Their bodies were brought back to Shechem and placed in the tomb that Abraham had bought from the sons of Hamor at Shechem for a certain sum of money. "As the time drew near for God to fulfil his promise to Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt had greatly increased. Then 'a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt.' He dealt treacherously with our people and oppressed our ancestors by forcing them to throw out their newborn babies so that they would die.' Acts 7:9-19

Two main themes run through this speech.

1. As a nation, the Jews were always unfaithful to God.

Joseph saved the Jews; he provided the Jews with their needs. The heads of the twelve tribes of Israel were moved by jealousy to act against the one whom God sent and was going to use to save them, [Acts 7:9](#).

Stephen tells them that they are rebelling against God. He then takes them through the events of [Genesis 37-Exodus 1](#). He tells them about Abraham's great-grandson, Joseph, who was sold into Egypt because of the jealousy of his own brothers, [Acts 7:9](#) / [Genesis 37:12-36](#). But God, in His providence, noted Joseph's mistreatment and delivered him, [Acts 7:10](#).

He went on to make him governor over the land of Egypt, [Acts 7:10](#) / [Genesis 41:37-44](#). A great famine left Jacob and his household without food to sustain them, [Acts 7:11](#) / [Genesis 47:13-50:26](#).

So, having heard of the plentiful food in Egypt, he sent his sons to purchase grain on two separate occasions, [Acts 7:12-13](#). On the second occasion, Joseph revealed his identity to his brothers and let Pharaoh know who they were, [Acts 7:13](#) / [Genesis 45:3](#).

Joseph, with the approval of Pharaoh, sent wagons to bring his aged father to Egypt, [Acts 7:14](#) / [Genesis 45:19](#).

Seventy-five souls left Canaan for the land of Egypt, [Acts 7:14](#). The figure of seventy-five persons is based on the LXX of [Genesis 46:27](#), and [Exodus 1:5](#), while the Hebrew text has seventy.

The figure seventy-five comes from leaving out Jacob and Joseph and including the remaining seven of Joseph's sons. In both cases, the number is the total of Jacob's descendants who went to Egypt or were born there. Jacob's body was carried back to Shechem to be laid in the cave of Machpelah alongside those of Abraham and Sarah, [Acts 7:15-16](#) / [Joshua 24:32-33](#).

According to [Genesis 49:29-32](#) and [Genesis 50:13](#), Jacob was buried in the cave of Machpelah near Hebron, which Abraham had bought from Ephron the Hittite, [Genesis 23](#).

Joseph was buried at Shechem, [Joshua 24:32](#), in the land which Jacob had bought from the sons of Hamor, [Genesis 33:18-20](#). Josephus states that Jacob's other sons were buried at Hebron.

There was a local tradition at Shechem that the twelve sons of Jacob were buried there. So, because of these texts, it looks like Stephen is telling them something different from the Old Testament Scriptures.

It seems that Stephen has followed a tradition, according to which not only Joseph but also his brothers were buried at Shechem, and that he has attributed the purchase of the grave there to Abraham by including an allusion to the story in [Genesis 23](#).

God had not forgotten his promise to Abraham, and as days passed, the children of Israel multiplied from the original seventy-five until they appeared to be a menace to the Egyptians, [Acts 7:16](#).

Additionally, a king ascended to the throne who did not recall the salvation of Egypt by the hand of Joseph, [Acts 7:18](#) / [Exodus 1:8](#). The king mistreated them by placing them in bondage and slaying their babies, [Acts 7:19](#) / [Exodus 1:15-22](#).

‘At that time, Moses was born, and he was no ordinary child. For three months, he was cared for by his family. When he was placed outside, Pharaoh's daughter took him and brought him up as her own son. Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action. “When Moses was forty years old, he decided to visit his own people, the Israelites. He saw one of them being mistreated by an Egyptian, so he went to his defence and avenged him by killing the Egyptian. Moses thought that his own people would realise that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not. The next day, Moses came upon two Israelites who were fighting. He tried to reconcile them by saying, ‘Men, you are brothers; why do you want to hurt each other?’ “But the man who was mistreating the other pushed Moses aside and said, ‘Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?’ When Moses heard this, he fled to Midian, where he settled as a foreigner and had two sons.’ [Acts 7:20-29](#)

2. As a nation, they continually rejected God's Leaders.

Stephen now talks about how Moses was rejected by God's own people, as we find in [Exodus 2](#). It was during those hard and difficult years in Egypt when all these babies were being murdered that Moses was born, [Exodus 1:15-22](#) / [Exodus 3](#).

We know from Exodus that Moses was hidden by his parents for three months, [Exodus 2:2](#), and afterwards, God caused him to be found by Pharaoh's daughter and reared as if he were her own son, [Acts 7:20-21](#) / [Exodus 2:5](#) / [Hebrews 11:23-29](#). He was taught everything the Egyptians of his day knew, [Acts 7:22](#).

He was a strong man in word and deed, [Acts 7:22](#). At the age of forty, he visited God's people, [Acts 7:23](#). He killed an Egyptian who was mistreating one of his brethren, [Acts 7:24](#) / [Exodus 2:11-13](#).

Moses thought they would understand that God intended to deliver them by His hand, but had to flee when a Jew questioned his authority and revealed he knew of the Egyptian's death, [Acts 7:25-28](#) / [Exodus 2:11-15](#). And so Moses fled to Midian, where he married and had two sons, [Acts 7:29](#) / [Exodus 2:11-25](#).

The people Stephen is talking to still didn't understand. Every time God sends someone, they kill them. He tells them they didn't understand Moses, as they didn't understand Stephen.

‘After forty years had passed, an angel appeared to Moses in the flames of a burning bush in the desert near Mount Sinai. When he saw this, he was amazed at the sight. As he went over to get a closer look, he heard the Lord say: ‘I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.’ Moses trembled with fear and did not dare to look. “Then the Lord said to him, ‘Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. I have indeed seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their groaning and have come down to set them free. Now come, I will send you back to Egypt.’ “This is the same Moses they had rejected with the words, ‘Who made you ruler and judge?’ He was sent to be their ruler and deliverer by God himself, through the angel who appeared to him in the bush. He led them out of Egypt and performed wonders and signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea and for forty years in the wilderness.’ [Acts 7:30-36](#)

Stephen, still under the accusation of blasphemy, carries on with Israel's history by reminding them of the events from [Exodus 3](#) through to [Numbers 13](#). He says that when Moses was eighty years old, God spoke to him from a burning bush in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, [Acts 7:30](#) / [Exodus 3:1-15](#).

God told him He had seen His people suffering in Egypt and heard their groaning. He told Moses that he would deliver the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage, [Acts 7:34](#) / [Exodus 3:7-12](#).

The angel that appeared to Moses was the Angel of the Lord, very possibly the preincarnate Christ, [Acts 7:31-33](#) / [Exodus 3:2](#) / [Exodus 3:6](#) / [Exodus 4:2](#) / [John 12:41](#) / [1 Corinthians 10:1-4](#) / [Hebrews 11:26](#).

What Stephen is doing here is reminding his listeners that God did deliver His people from Egyptian bondage, [Exodus 5:22-6:12](#). God did deliver them at the Red Sea, [Exodus 14:26-28](#), and looked after them for forty years in the wilderness, [Acts 7:35-36](#) / [Deuteronomy 8:2](#) / [Deuteronomy 29:5](#).

But his point is that God delivered them by the hands of the very one whom the children of Israel had previously rejected, [Acts 7:35](#). The God of Abraham.

‘This is the Moses who told the Israelites, ‘God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your own people.’ He was in the assembly in the wilderness, with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our ancestors; and he received living words to pass on to us. “But our ancestors refused to obey him. Instead, they rejected him and, in their hearts, turned back to Egypt. They told Aaron, ‘Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who led us out of Egypt—we don't know what has happened to him!’ That was the time they made an idol in the form of a calf. They brought sacrifices to it and revelled in what their own hands had made. But God turned away from them and gave them over to the worship of the sun, moon and stars. This agrees with what is written in the book of the prophets: “‘Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings forty years in the wilderness, people of Israel? You have taken up the tabernacle of Molek and the star of your god Rephan, the idols you made to worship. Therefore, I will send you into exile’ beyond Babylon.’ [Acts 7:37-43](#)

Jewish history is our history, and we need to understand where we come from. God's people didn't have photo albums to look back on; they only had the Old Testament Scriptures, and they were important to them. So important that Stephen goes ahead and reminds them of Israel's rebellion against God.

In [Acts 7:37](#), he quotes [Deuteronomy 18:15](#), as Peter did in [Acts 3:22-23](#), to remind them about the prophet whom God was going to raise up, that is, the Christ. Stephen reminds them of their adventures from [Numbers 14](#), right up until the Israelite's captivity in Babylon, as we read about in [1 Chronicles 9](#).

He says that the very deliverer was the one who foresaw the day God would raise up another prophet like him. Moses faithfully worked with those Jews who had been called out of bondage.

Through him, they had heard God's living message, [Acts 7:38](#). Yet, while Moses was receiving God's will on Mount Sinai, the people were rejecting that very will and turning back, at least in their hearts, toward Egypt.

When they got Aaron to make the golden calf for them to worship, [Acts 7:41](#) / [Exodus 32](#), the people were effectively rejecting the Almighty. He, in turn, gave them up to serve worthless idols, [Acts 7:42-43](#) / [Romans 1:24](#) and sent them into captivity, [Acts 7:43](#) / [Amos 5:25-27](#).

Kent, in his commentary, says the following.

'Stephen's quotation of [Amos 5:27](#), 'I will carry you away beyond Babylon,' differs from the OT. Both the Hebrew text and the LXX say 'Damascus.' The prophet Amos was foretelling the exile of the northern kingdom under the Assyrians, which would take them beyond Damascus. More than a century later, the southern kingdom was captured because of her similar disobedience to God and was deported to Babylon. Stephen has merely substituted this phrase in order to use this Scripture to cover the judgment of God on the entire nation.'

Molech, [Acts 7:43](#), was an Ammonite idol, and the Jews adopted him for themselves. It was made of brass, in the image of a bull sitting on its back legs with the front legs stretched out in front to make a shelf.

The worship of Molech was tied to the worship of the sun. The arms would be red hot, and they would sacrifice their children who were put inside the arms. The worship of Molech was forbidden, [Leviticus 18:21](#) / [Leviticus 20:2-5](#).

Israel was filled with idols at one time, and the Jewish people sacrificed their children, [2 Kings 23:10](#) / [Jeremiah 32:35](#).

The people in the Sanhedrin didn't want to be reminded of their past, and so Stephen wanted to show them from the Scriptures that their rejection of God was the very reason they were led away into Babylonian captivity.

By quoting [Amos 5:25-27](#), Stephen is trying to explain that this is also part of God's plan. Abraham's leaving to go to the Promised Land could only be done if Abraham followed God's instructions to the letter.

Joseph being taken to Egypt and Moses delivering them from Egypt could only be done if Joseph and Moses followed God's instructions to the letter. When God's people didn't follow His instructions to the letter, they were punished; that's why they ended up in Egypt and Babylon in the first place.

'Our ancestors had the tabernacle of the covenant law with them in the wilderness. It had been made as God directed Moses, according to the pattern he had seen. After receiving the tabernacle, our ancestors under Joshua brought it with them when they took the land from the nations God drove out before them. It remained in the land until the time of David, who enjoyed God's favour and asked that he might provide a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. But it was Solomon who built a house for him. "However, the Most High does not live in houses made by human hands. As the prophet says: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me?" says the Lord. Or where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things?' Acts 7:44-50

Stephen reminds them that God has a pattern for His people's lives which needs to be followed to the letter. In other words, if we want to live in God's true house, we need to live by His rules.

Stephen says the pattern for making the tabernacle was one of the things that God revealed through Moses, which had to be followed exactly, [Acts 7:44](#) / [Hebrews 8:5](#). The tabernacle was so important that the Israelites brought it into the Promised Land when they conquered it under Joshua's leadership, [Acts 7:45](#) / [Joshua 18](#).

Stephen says do remember David? [Acts 7:45](#) / [1 Kings 8:17-18](#). Stephen says David wanted to build a temple for God to dwell in, but God wouldn't let him, according to [1 Chronicles 28:3](#), because he was a man of war. Instead, Solomon, David's son, was allowed to build a temple, [1 Kings 6](#). And then Stephen gets to the point. He says that the Creator of the universe does not dwell in temples made with men's hands, [Acts 7:48](#).

In [Acts 7:49-50](#), Stephen quotes from [Isaiah 66:1-2](#) and [Psalm 102:25](#), which clearly show that God cannot be confined like the gods of the pagans. Instead, God, their God and our God today, who created the universe, has made the very universe He created to be His throne.

The Sanhedrin needed to ask themselves the very same question which Solomon asked many years before them: can they contain God? [1 Kings 8:27](#) / [Isaiah 66:1-2](#). Stephen makes his point and goes through all of that history to get to this important truth.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

'Stephen quoted [Isaiah 66:1-2](#) for support. He referred to Isaiah as 'the prophet.' As a prophet, Isaiah was worthy of as much respect as Moses. Significantly, the last part of [Isaiah 66:2](#) says that God esteems those who are humble and contrite in spirit and who tremble at His word. Stephen left this timely and powerful challenge unstated for his hearers.'

Neil, in his commentary, says the following.

'It would seem that these verses form the real thrust of Stephen's speech. In quoting with approval Isaiah's words, Stephen would appear to imply that, as Christ is the new Moses, he is also the new Temple. In him and through him alone can men approach God,' [John 2:19](#) / [John 2:21](#) / [Ephesians 2:19-22](#) / [Hebrews 9:1-10](#) / [1 Peter 2:5](#).'

"You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him- you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it." [Acts 7:51-54](#)

Notice the change of tone in Stephen's words. Steven tells them that they continued to do the same things their fathers did, that is, disobeyed God, [Acts 7:51-52](#) / [Acts 7:2](#) / [Acts 7:11-12](#) / [Acts 7:15](#) / [Acts 7:19](#) / [Acts 7:39](#) / [Acts 7:44-45](#).

These people ignored Jesus just as their fathers did. Stephen says, you're just like your fathers before you, your necks are as hard as a rock, so hard that you won't bow down to God, just like your relatives wouldn't.

The people whom Stephen is addressing had the outward signs of religion, but their hearts were far from the truth. They had been circumcised in the flesh, but their hearts were still encased in sinful flesh.

God told them time and time again through His prophets, [Acts 7:52](#), that the time was coming when He was going to send the Righteous One, whom we know as Jesus, [Acts 7:52](#) / [Acts 3:14](#) / [1 Kings 19:10](#) / [1 Kings 19:14](#) / [Nehemiah 9:26](#) / [Jeremiah 26:20-24](#) / [Luke 6:23](#) / [Luke 11:49](#) / [Luke 13:34](#) / [1 Thessalonians 2:15](#) / [Hebrews 11:36-38](#).

And again, just like their fathers before, they had persecuted and killed those prophets who foretold the coming of God's Righteous One, [2 Chronicles 36:15-16](#) / [Nehemiah 9:26](#) / [Jeremiah 2:30](#). Stephen said they had betrayed and murdered the Righteous One, [Matthew 21:33-39](#). He says you guys are just as bad as your ancestors were.

Despite the rebellion of God's people, God had always acted for their benefit. They had God's protection, [Acts 7:5-7](#). God was with Joseph, [Acts 7:9](#). They had the promise for Abraham, [Acts 7:17](#). They had Moses as a ruler, and God gave them their deliverance, [Acts 7:34](#), and God drove out people through Joshua, [Acts 7:45](#).

Stephen is speaking of the goodness of God, and he says God has never been limited to one place, and God appeared to Abraham, [Acts 7:2](#). God was in Egypt, [Acts 7:9](#), God was in the wilderness, [Acts 7:30](#). God is not limited to the temple, [Acts 7:48](#).

Their guilt was all the greater because they had received God's law, which angels had delivered, [Deuteronomy 33:2](#) / [Galatians 3:19](#) / [Hebrews 2:2](#), but they had disobeyed it, [Acts 7:53](#).

THE STONING OF STEPHEN

“When they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. “Look,” he said, “I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” At this, they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul”. Acts 7:55-58

The Jews were not as righteous and holy and as good as they thought they were because their reaction was very similar to that of those who were listening to Stephen.

Just like Peter's sermon, [Acts 2:37](#), the truth hurts because the truth cuts to the heart and they were raging, [Acts 7:54](#). And when we're faced with a reaction like this one, there is only one place to look, and that's heavenward, [Acts 7:55](#). It was the Lord's Spirit who had inspired Stephen to speak, [Acts 6:3](#) / [Acts 6:5](#) / [Acts 6:8](#) / [Acts 6:15](#), and it's the Lord's Spirit who now caused him to look intently into heaven.

Stephen looked up, and he saw God's glory and Jesus standing at the Father's right hand, [Acts 7:55-56](#). In the New Testament, Jesus is almost always described as sitting at the right hand of the Father, but not when one of His children is in trouble.

Stephen saw Him standing, which tells us that Jesus not only cares about us but He stands up for us, and we need to believe that He does that for us every time we're in trouble. In other words, don't look to the world for protection and all the answers; look to heaven for them.

Stephen told the council what he saw; they cried out, stopped their ears, rushed to him, threw him outside of the city and stoned him, [Acts 7:57-58](#). And it's here Luke tells us that those who stoned him laid their coats at the feet of a young Jewish Rabbi named Saul, [Acts 7:58](#). This is the first mention of Saul, and he's here standing and watching. Bruce, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Stephen has been confessing Christ before men, and now he sees Christ confessing His servant before God. The proper posture for a witness is the standing posture. Stephen, condemned by an earthly court, appeals for vindication to a heavenly court, and his vindicator in that supreme court is Jesus, who stands at God's right hand as Stephen's advocate, his 'paraclete.' When we are faced with words so wealthy in association as these words of Stephen, it is unwise to suppose that any single interpretation exhausts their significance. All the meaning that had attached to [Psalms 110:1](#) and [Daniel 7:13](#) is present here, including especially the meaning that springs from their combination on the lips of Jesus when He appeared before the Sanhedrin; but the replacement of 'sitting' by 'standing' probably makes its own contribution to the total meaning of the words in this context-a contribution distinctively appropriate to Stephen's present role as martyr-witness.'

“While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Then he fell on his knees and cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he fell asleep.” Acts 7:59-60

Notice that Stephen prayed to Jesus, **Acts 7:59**. He asked Jesus to receive his spirit, **Acts 7:59**, and we know from **Ecclesiastes 12:7** that the spirit goes back to God who gave it. This is important because this implies that Stephen recognised the deity of Christ. He identified Jesus as God.

I don't know many people who would say those words with their dying breath after going through what Stephen went through, except Jesus Himself, of course, **Luke 23:46**.

Bock, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Here Jesus, functioning as Judge, welcomed Stephen into heaven, showing that despite earthly rejection, Stephen was honoured in heaven.’

We should thank God for people like Stephen, who was willing even unto death to hold onto the truth, and even with his dying words, ask God to forgive them, **Acts 7:60**. Stephen's dying words echo the words of the Master He followed, who was dying on the cross of Calvary in **Luke 23:34**.

Morgan, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Between Stephen and Jesus there was communion of nature, there was communion of testimony, there was communion of suffering, and finally there was communion of triumph.’

We should note that Stephen's body fell asleep, **Acts 7:60**, not his soul. The Scriptures nowhere speak about ‘soul sleep’, **Acts 13:36** / **John 11:11** / **1 Thessalonians 4:13** / **1 Thessalonians 4:15**.

CHAPTER 8

INTRODUCTION

“And Saul approved of their killing him. On that day, a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison. Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.” **Acts 8:1-5**

THE CHURCH PERSECUTED AND SCATTERED

In the previous chapter, we read Stephen repeating with his dying breath the words of his Master Jesus, ‘forgive them’ and ‘Father receive my spirit,’ **Luke 23:34** / **Acts 7:59-60**. And in this chapter, Luke is going to share with us one of the most difficult times in church history.

In the previous chapter, Luke introduced us to a young man named Saul, **Acts 7:58**, and here he tells us that he was the person who approved Stephen's death, **Acts 8:1** / **Philippians 3:6**. This same Saul, who would later become Paul and who would turn out to be one of the greatest apostles of Christ in the history of the church, **1 Corinthians 15:9**. Remember, Jesus had given specific instructions for the apostles to ‘go into all the world and preach the good news,’ **Mark 16:15**. Jesus also said that the apostles would be ‘His witnesses in Jerusalem, and all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth,’ **Acts 1:8**.

Immediately following Stephen's death, an intense period of persecution followed, headed by a young Jewish Rabbi named Saul, [Acts 8:1](#). Luke tells us that 'godly' men buried Stephen and greatly mourned his death, [Acts 8:2](#) / [Luke 23:50-53](#) / [Acts 6:7](#).

To me, this is amazing because these God-fearing men from among the Jews still had enough faith in God to openly bury a Christian who had died such a violent death for preaching the Gospel, [Acts 7:58](#).

We may ask what is amazing about this? The Sanhedrin didn't do anything about these God-fearing men. Why? Because they must have recognised how wrong their actions were since their custom would not allow an individual grave and mourn for a person who had been judicially stoned, [Leviticus 10:6](#) / [Jeremiah 22:19](#). Yet again, the Jews kill another innocent man, and they know it.

It's interesting to see the apostles remaining in Jerusalem, and the other disciples driven to every corner of Judea and Samaria, [Acts 8:1](#). Why did the apostles stay behind?

Clement of Alexandria says that the Lord told them to stay in Jerusalem for twelve years. Others believe they thought they had to stay behind there, as that's where everyone knew where they would be.

When the devil wants to destroy a church, he will usually use the form of divide and conquer, and clearly that's what's happening here, [Acts 8:1](#). If Satan wants to destroy a church, he will also attack the leadership of that church because if he can destroy them, he usually ends up destroying the rest of the flock.

But what we can also see here is God's divine intervention. We see God protecting and keeping His apostles safe, after all, in the mind of Saul, everyone else who opposed the church was trouble, but God's will, will be done. God doesn't do evil, but He can use the evilness of men to get His will done.

The Gospel was supposed to be preached beginning in Jerusalem, where it did, but it was also to be spread in Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth, [Acts 8:1](#).

But that wasn't happening; the church was quite happy to stay in Jerusalem, but God wasn't happy. And so what we see happening here is God allowing the terrible acts of wicked men, who were persecuting the church, [Acts 8:1](#).

Why was God allowing this to happen? Because the Gospel needed to be heard in other parts of the earth, and that wasn't going to happen as long as the church stayed in its comfort zone, [Acts 11:19-30](#).

The only persecution we're really ever going to experience is rejection, but the faith of these Christians needs to be commended because even in the face of death, they shared their faith.

When Saul of Tarsus got wind of where Christians met, that sent fear throughout the whole church, and they were frightened. They were frightened, but they wouldn't give up their faith.

Even though some were caught and thrown into vile prisons and then brought before the elders in the synagogue, who tried to force them to deny Jesus, they wouldn't give up their faith in God, [Acts 22:4](#) / [Acts 26:10](#).

These Christians would rather die than deny their faith in Christ. Paul said that he had many Christians beaten and punished, but still they would not deny their faith in Christ, [Acts 3:8](#) / [Acts 26:11](#).

Stott, in his commentary, says the following.

'Not only did he not spare the women, but he did not stop short of seeking and securing his victims' death, [Acts 9:1](#) / [Acts 22:4](#) / [Acts 26:10](#).'

It's our faith in Christ that helps us through many difficult circumstances in life. God allowed the evil of wicked men to happen so that the Gospel could be spread, [Acts 8:5](#).

Spurgeon, in his commentary, says the following.

‘In every church where there is really the power of the Spirit of God, the Lord will cause it to be spread abroad, more or less. He never means that a church should be like a nut shut up in a shell; nor like ointment enclosed in a box. The precious perfume of the gospel must be poured forth to sweeten the air.’

PHILIP IN SAMARIA

“Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there. When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said. With shrieks, evil spirits came out of many, and many paralytics and cripples were healed. So there was great joy in that city’. Acts 8:4-8

This is not the apostle Philip, [Acts 8:40](#) / [Acts 21:8](#), this is the Philip who is mentioned in [Acts 6:5](#), as one of the seven. This Philip was an evangelist, he was a servant, and now he is an evangelist, and he is now in Samaria, [Acts 4:8](#).

SAMARIA

The city of Samaria was built by Omri, who was a wicked king in Israel, and it eventually became the capital city for the ten tribes of the northern kingdom, [1 Kings 16:23-26](#).

The Samaritans were of mixed descent, coming from the intermarriage of Jews and Gentiles. The Jews saw the Samaritans as unclean and therefore wouldn’t associate with them, [John 4:9](#). In other words, they were half Jew and half Gentile. Others saw them as being more Jew than Gentile.

If a Jew was walking down the street and he saw a Samaritan coming toward him, the Jew would cross over to the other side to avoid being contaminated, [Luke 10:25-37](#).

James and John wanted to bring fire to the Samaritans in order to destroy them, [Luke 9:51-56](#). It was in Samaria that Jesus met the woman at the well, and she was amazed that He actually spoke to her, never mind asking her to give him a drink, [John 4:9](#) / [John 4:19-26](#).

This Samaritan woman had no problems believing who Jesus claimed to be. In fact, when she went back to Samaria and told everyone what happened when she met Jesus, [John 4:39-41](#).

Despite previous grievances against the Samaritans, Philip went to Samaria and watered the seed which Christ had already sown when he spoke to the woman at the well and the other Samaritans who believed in Him, [Acts 8:5](#) / [Ephesians 2:14](#).

What exactly did Philip preach? He preached Christ, Philip preached Jesus as the promised Messiah, [Acts 8:5](#). As we have already seen with the words of the Samaritan women, the Samaritans would already be very familiar with the Messiah, [Deuteronomy 18:15-18](#).

The message that Philip was preaching hit home for multitudes of the Samaritans, and that message was confirmed as being true because God confirmed it came from Him by enabling Philip to work miracles, [Acts 8:6](#).

People who were sick were made well, those paralysed and lame were able to walk again, and those possessed by demons had the demons driven out of them, [Acts 8:7](#).

And the message and the miracles which confirmed the message caused the city to be filled with joy, [Acts 8:8](#) / [Acts 2:46-47](#). Remember, Philip had the ability to perform these miracles because the apostles had earlier laid their hands upon him and bestowed him with this gift, [Acts 6:6](#).

SIMON THE SORCERER

“Now, for some time, a man named Simon had practised sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great, and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, “This man is the divine power known as the Great Power.” They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his magic.” Acts 8:9-11

Luke introduces us to a man named Simon who was a sorcerer. Simon uses magic and trickery to convince people that he was a spokesman for God, [Acts 8:9](#).

He must have been doing this for some time because Luke tells us that both high and low classes of people were paying attention to him and thought he was from God. Hence why they called him, the Great Power of God, [Acts 8:10](#).

Simon had amazed many people for a long period of time because of his magic, [Acts 8:11](#), but his ‘power’ came from the devil, not God. I believe there is a lot of that happening in the religious world around us today. People are being drawn into believing anything they are being taught because of something they think they see happening.

But when we put our trust in the teachings of God and His Word as we find it revealed in His Word, that eliminates any fears of being misled by false prophets and false miracle workers, [2 Thessalonians 2:9-12](#).

Some people say that we need some sort of supernatural gift to prove we’re a Christian and we have the Spirit, but Jesus doesn’t teach that. He doesn’t mention anything about recognising people by their gifts, but what He does say is that you can recognise those who claim to be Christians by their fruit, [Matthew 7:15-17](#) / [Galatians 5:22-23](#).

People who claim they have some revelation from God need to ask themselves if God has revealed once for all the ‘faith’ or not, [Jude 3](#). God has either given us ‘everything’ we need for life and godliness through our knowledge revealed in His word, or He hasn’t, [2 Peter 1:1-3](#).

His word is useful for the teaching, rebuking, correcting and training, and we are ‘thoroughly equipped for everything’ He wants us to know and do, or it isn’t, [2 Timothy 3:16-17](#).

In other words, God’s Word is all we need, or it isn’t. All in all, it seems clear to me that God’s Word is all we need to know God, live like He wants us to live, and if we follow His plan of salvation, we will be with Him forever in heaven.

Rackham, in his commentary, says the following.

‘As the counterfeit of the true, these false prophets were among the most dangerous enemies of Christianity; and the distinction between the true and the false, between religion and spiritualism, had to be sharply drawn once for all.’

“But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.” Acts 8:12-13

When Philip preached the good news about Christ and His kingdom, with the accompanying signs, people were set free from these false prophets. This is one of those passages where common sense needs to come into play. Philip preached the kingdom of God and the Name of Jesus Christ, [Acts 8:12](#). The text doesn’t mention anything about Philip preaching baptism.

But common sense tells us that this verse makes it clear that preaching belief in Jesus and burial in His Name is a crucial part of preaching about the kingdom, [Acts 1:3](#) / [Acts 1:6](#) / [Acts 8:12](#) / [Acts 14:22](#) / [Acts 19:8](#) / [Acts 20:25](#) / [Acts 28:23](#) / [Acts 28:31](#).

Why would both men and women be baptised if Philip didn’t preach it? [Acts 8:12](#). Why would Simon, having been amazed by what he saw and heard, believe and be baptised? [Acts 8:13](#).

Because baptism for the forgiveness of our sins is part of the good news, Mark 16:15-16. We've already established that baptism is for the forgiveness of our sins when we looked at Acts 2:38.

Baptism is part of the good news because it's through baptism for the forgiveness of our sins that unites us with Christ and His baptism and His death, Romans 6:3-5. The Samaritans had no trouble understanding what Philip was preaching to them concerning Jesus and what Jesus wanted everyone to do.

Simon believed and was baptised, Acts 8:13, and there's no reason to believe he was actually genuine in his faith at this point. Notice also that Simon followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw, Acts 8:13.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

'Having practised Satan's magic, Simon could not believe the difference between Philip's God-given miracles and his own magic.'

"When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit." Acts 8:14-17

When the good news about what was happening in Samaria got to the ears of the apostles who were still in Jerusalem, Luke tells us they sent Peter and John to the city, Acts 8:14. Peter is about to open the door to heaven for the Gentiles, using one of the keys Jesus gave him, Matthew 16:18-19.

Peter and John prayed that these new believers would receive the Holy Spirit because they had only been baptised into the Lord's Name, Acts 8:15-16. Remember at our baptism we receive the 'gift' of the Holy Spirit Himself to dwell within us, Acts 2:38 / Romans 8:9.

These new believers would have the 'gift', but now they are going to receive the 'gifts' of the Holy Spirit by the laying on of the apostle's hands, Acts 8:17 / Acts 9:17 / Acts 19:6 / 1 Timothy 4:14 / 2 Timothy 1:6.

What we see happening here is the power of Jesus changing lives and people's attitudes towards others. It wasn't all that long ago when John and his brother, James, asked Jesus to destroy Samaria. It wasn't that long ago that the Jewish John wanted to call down fire from heaven to destroy this Samaritan city that refused to receive Jesus, Luke 9:51-56.

But now the new Christian John is praying for them, and not only did he pray for them, but he and Peter laid their hands on them so that they might receive the miraculous gift of the Holy Spirit, Acts 8:17 / Luke 11:13 / 1 Corinthians 12:7-10. And it's here that we discover the real reason why Simon wanted to become a Christian.

"When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin." Then Simon answered, "Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me." When they had testified and proclaimed the word of the Lord, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages". Acts 8:18-25

Before we look at Simon's sin, let me point out a couple of important truths revealed here in this text. Clear evidence of a person receiving the miraculous gifts must have been present because Simon was able to 'see' this being accomplished through the laying on of the apostles' hands, Acts 8:18.

Remember that Philip was numbered among the seven in Acts 6:5-6, and he was one of the men whom the apostles had laid their hands upon to bestow miraculous gifts of the Spirit.

Ask yourself this question: why didn't Philip pass on the miraculous gifts to those who were baptised in Samaria? The simple answer is that he couldn't because he could not bestow miraculous gifts onto anyone. That's why he sent for Peter and John to do it because he couldn't.

My point is this: it was only the apostles who could pass on these miraculous gifts. And if we were around then and they bestowed these gifts upon us, then we, like Philip, could perform miracles, but we could not pass those abilities on to someone else.

In other words, when the apostles died, no one was left to pass on these miraculous gifts. And when those who had these gifts bestowed upon them, who were still living after the apostles died, when they died, all miraculous gifts died with them. Why? Because just like Philip, they could not pass these gifts on, that's why.

This is also one of many texts that support the fact that not all Christians were given miraculous gifts. Simon had believed and had been baptised, Mark 16:16, so there is no doubt he had been saved from his former sins, Acts 2:38. Harrison, in his commentary, says the following.

'It appears that Simon was really converted, but that the habits of the old life had not been broken.'

Yet, when Simon was confronted with a power potentially so useful for dominating the city of Samaria, he reverted to a materialistic approach and tried to purchase the power from Peter and John, Acts 8:18-19 / Isaiah 55:1. Not all Christians received miraculous gifts, and Simon is one of those people.

Morgan, in his commentary, says the following.

'The sin was a desire to possess spiritual power for personal ends.'

Simon's attempt to purchase this power with money led Peter to tell Simon that he and his money would perish together if his heart was not changed, Acts 8:20-21. He could have no part in matters eternal so long as his heart was not right with God.

Some people become Christians for the wrong reasons, and some become Christians for the right reasons. But every single Christian is tempted in many different ways, 1 Corinthians 10:13. Simon's temptation to be even more popular was so great that he was even willing to pay for it.

There's nothing wrong with wanting to be great in God's kingdom, provided we're willing to start from the bottom up, Matthew 20:25-28 / John 13:8. We don't become great in God's kingdom by becoming a dictator; we become great by serving.

When we serve and become a slave for Christ and our brothers and sisters in Christ first, then we become great. Christianity is not a popularity contest; Christianity is a group of slaves who are willing to serve from the bottom up, Philippians 2:5-11.

And if we find ourselves wanting to become great by any means other than serving, then we must do what Peter instructed Simon to do, repent and pray that God would forgive us, Acts 8:22-23.

Simon became a Christian and was freed from sin, but the power of sin allowed his heart to be bound by sin once again. And so Simon acknowledged to the apostles that he had sin in his heart and asked the apostles to pray for him, Acts 8:24 / James 5:16.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

'Simon was to the Samaritan church what Ananias and Sapphira were to the Jerusalem church: an early instance of self-seeking, Acts 5:1-11. Peter may have wondered if God would judge Simon as He had Ananias and Sapphira, if Simon was about to fall dead at his feet.'

No one knows what happened to Simon after this event. We don't know if he remained faithful to the Lord or went back to his old ways. Tradition says he departed from the Lord and became a false teacher among the early Christians.

Luke tells us that after Simon's request, Peter and John had finished preaching the Word of God in Samaria, and then they returned to Jerusalem, preaching in all the cities of Samaria along the way, [Acts 8:25](#).

PHILIP AND THE ETHIOPIAN

"Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road-the desert road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it." Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked. "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. The eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture: "He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation, he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth." The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" [Acts 8:26-35](#)

Notice how often the 'angel of the Lord' appears in Luke's Gospel and Acts, [Luke 1:11](#) / [Luke 2:9](#) / [Acts 12:7](#) / [Acts 12:23](#) / [Acts 7:30](#) / [Acts 7:35](#) / [Acts 7:38](#) / [Acts 10:3](#) / [Acts 10:7](#) / [Acts 10:22](#) / [Acts 11:13](#) / [Acts 12:11](#) / [Acts 27:23](#). Luke is reminding us of God's presence and activity among His people.

Luke tells Theophilus, [Acts 1:1](#), that Philip was directed by the angel of the Lord to go south to a place along the Jerusalem to Gaza road where no people lived, [Acts 8:26](#).

He was told to go south to the desert road, which was a road by the sea. It was a coastal road that linked Egypt to Palestine. The desert road could also mean an unpopulated place, a place where there were no people, [Matthew 14:15](#).

The word Eunuch means palace official and Luke tells us that he served under the great Queen Candace of the Ethiopians and his job was treasurer for her, [Acts 8:27](#).

He was going to Jerusalem to worship, [Acts 8:27](#). The Eunuch was obviously a converted Jew because not only did he have a copy of Isaiah's prophecy, but he was on his way home after worship in Jerusalem, [Acts 8:28](#).

Eunuchs couldn't worship in the inner part of the temple; they were banned from entering there, [Deuteronomy 23:1](#). They couldn't go any further than the court of the Gentiles.

We also need to understand that the Jews didn't have copies of the Old Testament as readily available as we do today. There were scribes whose job it was to copy the Old Testament Scriptures for Synagogues and for those who could afford to have one copied.

Because he had a copy of a scroll, this tells us that the Ethiopian Eunuch certainly had an important job with good pay. Philip, with the Spirit's prompting, ran alongside the chariot, and asked the Eunuch, 'Do you understand what you are reading?' [Acts 8:29-30](#).

Now, unlike the Jews who were listening to Stephen's sermon, the Eunuch had an open heart, and I know he had an open heart because of his response to Philip.

He replies to Philip, 'How can I unless someone explains it to me?' [Acts 8:31](#). An open heart is a searching heart, and a searching heart is always going to strive to understand better. He was struggling to understand what Isaiah meant when he wrote, [Isaiah 53:7-8](#) / [Acts 8:32-33](#).

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘While travelling, he was reading the Septuagint translation of Isaiah’s prophecy, i.e., [Isaiah 53:7-9](#) / [Isaiah 56:3-8](#). Perhaps he had purchased this roll of Isaiah in Jerusalem.’

When Philip accepted his invitation to sit with him in the chariot, the Eunuch asked the most important question of all, ‘Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?’ [Acts 8:34](#). When we’re studying with anyone, it’s always useful to start where that person is in their understanding of the Scriptures.

“Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. As they travelled along the road, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. Why shouldn’t I be baptized?”

And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and travelled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.” [Acts 8:36-40](#)

Most of the Jews regarded [Isaiah 52:13](#) to [Isaiah 53:12](#) as referring to their nation or to the Gentile nations. Jesus quoted [Isaiah 53](#) as finding fulfilment in His passion, [Luke 22:37](#). Philip followed Jesus’ interpretation and from this passage proceeded to preach Jesus to the eunuch, [Acts 8:35](#) / [Acts 8:5](#) / [Mark 10:45](#).

This is another good example of the Gospel being preached, but notice the text doesn’t say anything about Philip preaching baptism to the Eunuch. Common sense again tells us that when a person is preaching about Jesus, they have to include baptism in that preaching, [Matthew 28:19-20](#) / [Mark 16:15-16](#).

Philip must have preached baptism; why else would the Ethiopian nobleman ask Philip, ‘Look, here is water. What’s stopping me from being baptised?’ And Philip replied, ‘If you believe with all your heart. The Eunuch answered I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God,’ [Acts 8:36-37](#).

Although [Acts 8:37](#) is omitted from some translations, like the NIV, it is obvious from other Scriptures that one desiring the Lord, to confess His Name before the Father, will confess Jesus before men, [Matthew 10:32-33](#) / [Romans 10:9-10](#).

And so the Eunuch confessed Jesus as the Son of God in front of Philip and then ordered the chariot to stand still. It’s then that Luke tells us that both Philip and the Ethiopian went down into the water and Philip baptised him for the forgiveness of his sins, [Acts 8:38](#).

And so the Eunuch became a Christian in the same way that all others became Christians in the first-century church. And indeed in the same way that we all became Christians, by being baptised into Christ for the forgiveness of our sins.

And the outcome of such obedience is always the same, rejoicing in the Lord for what He has done for us, [Acts 8:39](#) / [Psalm 13:5-6](#) / [Acts 2:46-47](#) / [Acts 8:8](#) / [Acts 16:34](#).

And so immediately following their coming up out of the water, the Spirit caused Philip to be gone from the presence of the eunuch. And on his journey back to Caesarea, [Acts 21:8](#), Philip preached in the coastal cities like Azotus along the way, [Acts 8:39-40](#) / [Acts 1:8](#).

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The Holy Spirit directed Philip to the eunuch, [Acts 8:29](#), and He led him away from him, [Acts 8:39](#). Luke stressed the Spirit’s leadership in this evangelism of the first Gentile convert in Acts, [Matthew 12:18](#). God had prepared both Philip, [Acts 8:29](#), and the eunuch, [Acts 8:30](#), for their especially important conversation.’

It’s interesting that Philip is the only one in the New Testament specifically named as ‘the evangelist’, [Acts 21:8](#). I understand that the Bible doesn’t tell us about what happened to the Eunuch when he got back home, and I, for one, find that frustrating. I also understand the reason we are not told because it’s not that important for us to know.

CHAPTER 9

INTRODUCTION

“Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.” Acts 9:1-2

In the previous chapter, we saw how Philip baptised the Ethiopian eunuch and then was taken away in the Spirit. But while all this was going on, we need to remember there was a great persecution taking place in the background, led by a man named Saul, Acts 8:1-3.

Saul was the one who went out of his way to get the Christians; this was probably around 37A.D. He thought that God would be happy when all of the Christians were dead.

Luke tells us that Saul was so determined to do what he thought was religiously right, not only did he persecute the church in Jerusalem, but he also went to foreign cities to carry out his vicious persecution, Acts 9:1-2. And make no doubt about it, Saul was very vicious when it came to persecuting the Lord’s church, Galatians 1:13-14.

Damascus is the oldest inhabited city in the world. It was the ancient capital of Syria, Genesis 14:15, which was later captured by David, 2 Samuel 8:5. It was one hundred and thirty miles northeast of Jerusalem, and it had a large Jewish population, around forty thousand people. It also had thirty to forty synagogues, a synagogue is a Jewish meeting place, and a temple was the centre of worship.

We know the Lord’s church has many names in the Bible. The church is called ‘the church of God,’ 1 Corinthians 1:2. The church is also called ‘the church of Christ,’ Romans 16:16. And here we’re introduced to another name for the Lord’s church.

Saul was authorised to seek out a group of people who followed ‘the Way’, Acts 9:2. Those who followed ‘the Way’ were Christians like you and me who followed Jesus Christ during Luke’s day. The Lord has always had a Way or a pattern for His children to follow. Malachi tells us about priests who had turned from ‘the way,’ Malachi 2:7-8.

Jesus Himself declared that I am the way, John 14:6-7, and all the way through the Book of Acts, we see people who are followers of ‘the Way’, Acts 9:1-2 / Acts 18:25 / Acts 18:26 / Acts 19:9 / Acts 19:23 / Acts 24:22.

Those people are the very people whom Saul would go searching for, and when he found either men or women who followed that belief, he was authorised to take them in bonds to Jerusalem, Acts 9:2.

It was Saul who ravaged the church, it was Saul who killed many in the church, Acts 22:4, and it was Saul who travelled all over the world to persecute Christians, Acts 26:10-11.

SAUL’S CONVERSION

“As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” “Who are you, Lord?” Saul asked. “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” he replied. “Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.” The men travelling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes, he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days, he was blind and did not eat or drink anything.” Acts 9:3-9

Saul's visit to Damascus was going to be his last one for persecution reasons, but Luke tells us that his mission of persecution was interrupted by a great light coming down from heaven and shining around him, [Acts 9:3](#).

There are three accounts of Saul's conversion. Here we read of the historic account, later, he speaks to a large crowd in Jerusalem and tells them about his conversion, [Acts 22:3-16](#), and finally, he told King Agrippa about his conversion for his own defence, [Acts 26:9-18](#).

[Acts 22:6](#) tells us that Paul revealed that this happened at midday, when the sun shines at its brightest and yet Paul said that this light was brighter than the sun, [Acts 26:13](#).

Can you imagine being there on that road? You're merrily plodding along the road, discussing what you are going to do with these people who follow 'the Way'.

You're building up your righteous bank account, climbing up the religious ladder with all your good deeds and then suddenly not only does a bright light appear, but a voice is heard too, [Acts 9:4](#).

F.F. Bruce says in his commentary, the following.

'The rabbis of Saul's day mostly believed that God no longer spoke to man directly, as He did in the days of the prophets. However, they believed that one could hear the 'echo' of God's voice, what they called 'the daughter of the voice of God.'

No wonder Luke tells us Saul fell to the ground as the voice asked, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' [Acts 9:4](#). Notice that God uses Saul's name twice; this implies deep emotion on behalf of God, [Luke 10:41](#) / [Matthew 23:37](#).

Saul asked who it was that was speaking, [Acts 9:5](#), and the voice replied according to [Acts 26:14](#), 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'

Saul obviously didn't recognise Jesus, as Stephen did, [Acts 7:55-56](#), but does call Him Lord, [Acts 9:5](#). After Jesus speaks, he appears to recognise that it is Jesus, who wasn't dead but very much alive, [1 Corinthians 9:1](#) / [1 Corinthians 15:8](#).

Let's just stop and think about this for a moment. Here is a man who approved Stephen's death, [Acts 8:1](#), here is a man who viciously went about killing and imprisoning the followers of Jesus, [Acts 9:1-2](#).

And now Jesus says to this same man, 'Saul, when you are doing all these things and persecuting my people, you are actually persecuting Me'. He says, 'Saul, it's hard for you to kick against the goads', [Acts 26:14](#).

What Jesus means is that Saul was the ox and Jesus was the farmer. Saul was stubborn, and so Jesus had to goad him in the right direction, and the goading caused Saul pain.

Just like some in Peter's audience in [Acts 2](#) panicked and asked, 'What must we do?' [Acts 2:37](#), after they realised what they had done in killing the Messiah. Saul trembled and asked what he must do, [Acts 22:10](#).

God is not only a giver of good things, [James 1:17](#), but He also wants something in return; He wants obedience to His Word. God doesn't make disciples for the sake of it; He makes disciples to serve and do His will. The Lord said to Saul, 'This is what I want you to do: I want you to arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do', [Acts 9:6](#).

Saul's travelling companions seem to have heard a sound but were unable to see anyone, [Acts 9:7](#), or understand the words spoken, according to [Acts 22:9](#). And although, according to [Acts 26:14](#), they all had fallen to the ground, they 'stood' in a state of speechlessness, [Acts 9:7](#).

And so when Saul got up, he was blind, so his friends had to lead him by the hand into the city and for three days, he prayed and fasted, unwilling or unable, to take food because of the tremendous shock he had received on the Damascus road, [Acts 9:8-9](#).

When Saul of Tarsus had an encounter with the risen Lord, he knew from that moment on that Jesus Christ is precious. We've all been persecutors of 'the Way' without realising it. Paul says we have all been on that road because we were alienated and enemies of God, but now, just like Paul, we have become His servants, Colossians 1:21-23.

We must note that Saul wasn't saved at this moment despite his experience on the road to Damascus. Paul thought he was on the road to Damascus, but God changed that plan and put him on the road to salvation.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'What a different status came to him as a result of his blindness, and how utterly unlike his projected entry into Damascus was the entry itself. Not as a savage persecutor, but as a helpless, blind man, he entered the city where his life would be changed forever. The emotional shock he received is indicated by his not eating anything for three days.'

"In Damascus, there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered. The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision, he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight." "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name." But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." Acts 9:10-16

Notice what Luke records here: he says that 'a certain disciple', not an apostle or preacher, a disciple of Christ, saw a vision from the Lord, Acts 9:10. This certain disciple was named Ananias, and it must have been a bit of a shock for Ananias to hear the Lord speaking and then, after replying, 'yes Lord', to be told to go to Straight Street, the house of Judas and ask for Saul of Tarsus, Acts 9:10-11. Straight Street means the longest street.

Notice that Jesus said that Saul would be praying. This is something Paul did regularly as a Pharisee, but also after he became a Christian, Acts 16:25 / Acts 20:36 / Acts 22:17. Jesus also prayed regularly whilst He was on earth as a man, Luke 3:21 / Luke 6:12 / Luke 9:18 / Luke 9:28 / Luke 11:1 / Luke 22:41.

It must have been even more of a shock when the Lord said Saul was praying and had seen in a vision, a man named Ananias coming and putting his hand on him so that he might receive his sight, Acts 9:12.

Ananias was scared and hesitated to do what the Lord asked him to do, but I think that's understandable. Ananias knew all about the persecution in Jerusalem and the letters Saul carried from the chief priests, which gave him authority to bind any Christians he found in Damascus, Acts 9:13-14.

Note that this is the first time the term 'saint' is used, which means Holy, to be set apart for a purpose, Acts 9:13 / Colossians 3:12-17 / 2 Timothy 2:21. The Lord was aware of Ananias' fear as He is aware of our fear. He told him that Saul was specially chosen to take his Name to the Gentiles, kings and the Jews, Acts 9:15. And so, if we have ever wondered why we were chosen to be a Christian, here is one reason why to take the Name of Jesus to others.

Salvation is not only ours to keep, but it's ours to share, Matthew 28:19-20 / 1 Peter 3:15. And so, just as He tells us to go and do His will, He tells Ananias to go and do His will.

God also tells Ananias that He will show Saul how much he will suffer for His Name, Acts 9:16. This is also expected of all Christians; we will suffer for the sake of Christ, Matthew 5:10-11 / Matthew 10:16-25 / Romans 18:8 / 2 Timothy 3:12.

Longenecker, in his commentary, says the following.

‘In highlighting these features of being a ‘chosen instrument,’ sent to ‘the Gentiles,’ and to ‘suffer for my [Jesus]’ name,’ Luke has, in effect, given a theological précis of all he will portray historically in chapters 13-28, a précis that also summarizes the self-consciousness of Paul himself as reflected in his own letters.’

“Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here, has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength.” Acts 9:17-19

Ananias arrives at the house of Judas, who lived on Straight Street, [Acts 9:11](#), and interestingly, as he laid his hands on Saul, Ananias calls Saul ‘brother’, [Acts 9:17](#). Perhaps because they were both from fleshly Israel, or in anticipation of Saul’s impending baptism, which would result in his being one of God’s children in Christ. We don’t really know, but we do know that He tells Saul that Jesus, who appeared to him on the road, sent him so that he may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit, [Acts 9:17](#).

Saul’s sight was miraculously restored through the laying on of Ananias’ hands, [Acts 9:17](#), and, according to [Acts 2:38](#), Saul received the gift of the Holy Spirit after he was baptised.

How could Ananias miraculously heal Saul’s eyes if he wasn’t an apostle? It’s possible that an apostle laid their hands on him to impart to him the gift of healing because there were certainly Christians in Damascus, and so, it’s possible an apostle laid their hands on him there, [Acts 9:1-2](#).

The truth is, we simply don’t know because the text doesn’t tell us. Whatever conclusion we come to, it must be consistent with every other example we find within the Scriptures, that is, the apostles laid their hands on people to receive the miraculous gifts. We can’t take an obscure example like this and make a whole new doctrine out of it.

Some people are just physically blind, which is bad enough, but most people in the world suffer from another kind of blindness, spiritual blindness, [2 Corinthians 4:4](#). Saul saw the light in more ways than one, and it changed the direction of his life forever.

And let me tell you what happens when the blind are healed spiritually: they see things for what they really are. And when they see things for what they really are, their immediate response will be the same as the Jews in [Acts 2:38-41](#), the Samaritans in [Acts 8:5-12](#), the Eunuch in [Acts 8:26-40](#) and Saul of Tarsus here, he got up and was baptised, [Acts 9:18](#).

Saul got up, was baptised and started eating again, [Acts 9:18-19](#). Remember that he didn’t eat for three days, [Acts 9:9](#). Here is a man who was once a persecutor of the Way of Christ but is now a follower of the Way of Christ.

When someone is baptised into Christ for the forgiveness of their sins, not only does it wash their sin away, not only do they receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, [Acts 2:38](#), but it also changes their whole life around to the point that some of their closest friends may not even recognise them.

And that’s exactly what happened when Saul of Tarsus met Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus; it didn’t change his appearance, but it certainly changed his attitude towards his God and others.

[Galatians 1:15-17](#) tells us that Saul later wrote that immediately following his conversion, he did not consult with others about the Scriptures but went into Arabia and later returned to Damascus.

SAUL IN DAMASCUS AND JERUSALEM

“Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. At once, he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. All those who heard him were astonished and asked, “Isn’t he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn’t he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief

priests?" Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ. After many days had gone by, the Jews conspired to kill him, but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night, they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall". Acts 9:19-25

Luke tells us that Saul the persecutor has now become Saul the preacher, 1 Timothy 1:13 / 1 Timothy 1:16. And so immediately after being baptised, he broke his fast by partaking in some food, Acts 9:18-19, and Saul began to be with the disciples, Acts 9:19.

Notice what he did right after becoming a Christian. Luke says, Saul 'at once' or 'immediately' began preaching in Damascus, then went to Arabia, Galatians 1:15-17 / 2 Corinthians 11:32-33, and returned to preach in Damascus again, Acts 9:20.

He preached in the synagogues that Jesus was the Son of God, Acts 9:20. When Jesus called Himself the Son of God, and when others called Him that, it was understood as a clear claim to His deity, Matthew 26:63-65.

In other words, the minute we become a Christian is the minute our light should begin to shine for Christ, Matthew 5:13-14. The minute we become a Christian is the very minute we become a preacher for Christ.

I'm not talking about becoming a preacher in terms of standing behind a pulpit; I am talking about every single Christian should be able to at least tell anyone they meet about how and why they became a Christian.

Luke tells us that those who heard the former persecutor preach marvelled at his preaching, Acts 9:21. They are amazed that this same man was the one who was creating havoc on everyone who called on the Name of the Lord, and now he is preaching about Jesus, Acts 9:21 / 2 Corinthians 5:17.

And as Saul grew in strength, he successfully answered the challenge of the Jews and was able to prove Jesus is God's anointed Son, Acts 9:22. And like we have seen time and time again throughout the Book of Acts, when people preach the truth, it's going to upset other people.

Luke says that no one was able to disprove Saul's arguments, and so the Jews plotted to kill him, Acts 9:22-23. And so Saul learned of the plot and the brethren delivered him in a basket through the wall and outside the city, Acts 9:24-25 / 2 Corinthians 11:32.

Boice, in his commentary, says the following.

'It was the beginning of many escapes for Paul, and sometimes he didn't quite escape. Sometimes they caught him, imprisoned him, beat him. He did indeed have to suffer many things for Jesus' sake.'

"When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles". Acts 9:26-27

We can completely understand why the disciples were afraid of Saul, Acts 9:26. After all, it was only a short time ago that this same guy was going around persecuting the followers of 'the Way' himself, Acts 9:1-2.

The disciples didn't believe that Saul was now a Christian, Acts 9:26, possibly because they thought he was going undercover to trap more Christians. But they should never underestimate the power of God to change people's lives. Notice it is was Barnabas, the son of encouragement, Acts 4:36, who brought Saul to the apostles, Acts 9:27 / Acts 4:36-37 / Acts 11:22-30 / Acts 13:1 / Acts 14:28 / Acts 15:2-4 / Acts 15:12 / Acts 15:22.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

'The apostles whom Saul met were Peter and James, the Lord's half-brother, Galatians 1:17-19. Paul wrote later that he stayed with Peter for fifteen days, Galatians 1:15, but he may have been in Jerusalem somewhat longer at this time. James was an apostle in the general sense of that term. He was not one of the Twelve.'

One of the reasons God chose Saul of Tarsus to become a Christian was to give hope to those very people that we think will never become Christians, 1 Timothy 1:15-16. If God can change the life of Saul the persecutor around, then surely He can change the life of anybody around.

Sometimes we try too hard to look for ways to share the Gospel with others. One way we could share the Gospel with others is simply by remembering how we heard about the good news first, but if we're not comfortable sharing the Gospel that way, then try Saul's approach as we find him doing next.

“He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus.” Acts 9:27

Barnabas now goes ahead and informs them that Paul received the message he preached by revelation, he received it directly from God, and he was chosen before the creation of the world to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles, Acts 9:27 / Galatians 1:11 / Galatians 1:18.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Barnabas pointed out three indications that Saul’s conversion was genuine for the benefit of the Christian sceptics. Saul had seen the Lord, he had talked with Him, and he had witnessed boldly in Damascus in Jesus’ name. Imagine how difficult it must have been for those Christians who had relatives whom Saul had persecuted to sit down with him in church meetings and share the Lord’s Supper.’

Barnabas simply shared Saul’s testimony. Simply by sharing our testimony about how our lives were so empty and meaningless until someone took the time to share with us how God can turn our lives around for the better.

And just like Saul’s preaching was in Damascus, the more we do it, the easier it gets, and the easier it gets, the more confident we get. And it seems from the text that the bolder a person’s preaching becomes, the more people are going to get upset.

“So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. He talked and debated with the Grecian Jews, but they tried to kill him. When the brothers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus”. Acts 9:28-30

Just as Stephen had done in Acts 6:8-9, Saul debated with the Hellenists, Acts 9:28, and just like Stephen, they attempted to kill him too, Acts 9:29. And so again, when the brethren discovered the plot, they sent Saul to Tarsus by way of Caesarea, Acts 9:30 / Acts 21:39 / Galatians 1:21.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Caesarea was the residence of Roman procurators, a strongly garrisoned town with a military presence numbering at least 3,000, and by far the key city in Rome’s relationship with Palestine. In fact, Tacitus said, “Caesarea is the capital of Judaea.’

I want to make an important point here about Saul’s actions. Two times the Jews tried to kill Saul, and two times he was basically taken away for his own safety, Acts 9:24-25 / Acts 9:29-30.

Witherington, in his commentary, says the following.

‘There are some interesting similarities between the beginning of Saul’s ministry and the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, cf. Acts 9:20-35 and Luke 4:16-30. Both men began their ministries by entering a synagogue and delivering a salvation message. The audiences in both cases reacted with shock and astonishment. In Jesus’ case, the audience asked if He was not the son of Joseph, and in Saul’s case, the audience asked if he was not the violent persecutor of Christians. Then both men escaped a violent response to their messages.’

We sometimes get into this mindset that Christians should always stand their ground and never run away from any situation. But there are times when our safety needs to come first, especially when God is not finished with us yet.

God is not finished with Saul. He has plans for him, and when we find ourselves in a situation where our lives are at risk, just remember, unless it's God's will, He's not finished with us because He has plans for us. While all this was going on, Saul left for Tarsus, and God, as He always does, is working in the background.

“Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord”. Acts 9:31

Luke tells us that a period of peace was enjoyed by the church in Judea, Galilee and Samaria. He says the church was strengthened, and all the Christians walked in reverent respect for the Lord, [2 Chronicles 19:7](#) / [Job 28:28](#) / [Psalms 19:9](#) / [Psalms 111:10](#) / [Proverbs 1:7](#) / [Proverbs 9:10](#) / [Proverbs 13:13](#).

He also tells us they received the comfort of the Holy Spirit, [John 14:16-17](#) / [Romans 5:1-5](#) / [Romans 14:19](#) / [Romans 15:2](#) / [1 Corinthians 8:1](#). And look what happened?

Luke says that all of this resulted in a further multiplication of the number of disciples. It's always a time for rejoicing when someone becomes a Christian, no matter where it happens, [Luke 15:10](#).

AENEAS AND DORCAS

“As Peter travelled about the country, he went to visit the saints in Lydda. There he found a man named Aeneas, a paralytic who had been bedridden for eight years. “Aeneas,” Peter said to him, “Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and take care of your mat.” Immediately, Aeneas got up. All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord”. Acts 9:32-35

At the same time as the Lord's church is enjoying peace, [Acts 9:31](#), Luke records two miracles of Peter, the first of which is recorded next. As Peter visited the Lord's people who lived in Lydda, [Acts 1:8](#) / [Acts 5:16](#), he found a man who had never been out of his bed for eight years because he was a paralytic, [Acts 9:32-33](#).

And notice that Peter never took the credit for healing Aeneas. Peter told Aeneas that it was Jesus Christ who healed him, [Acts 9:34](#). Notice also that this miracle was very similar to one that Jesus performed in Jerusalem.

John tells us that the paralytic who had been that way for thirty-eight years was healed by Jesus, ‘at once’, [John 5:8-9](#).

Luke tells us that Aeneas was healed ‘immediately’, [Acts 9:34](#).

There's none of this, ‘you don't have enough faith’ or ‘just wait a few weeks, and you'll be healed’. Aeneas was healed ‘immediately’, and news of that healing spread fast.

People in the city of Lydda, as well as the surrounding coastal plain of Sharon, [Isaiah 33:9](#) / [Acts 2:1](#) / [Acts 9:16](#) / [Acts 27:29](#), heard the news and they too turned to Jesus, [Acts 9:35](#) / [Acts 11:21](#) / [2 Corinthians 3:16](#). And so Luke goes on to record Peter's second miracle.

“In Joppa, there was a disciple named Tabitha (which, when translated, is Dorcas), who was always doing good and helping the poor. About that time, she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, “Please come at once!” Peter went with them, and when he arrived, he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them”. Acts 9:36-39

Luke tells us that a hardworking, Christian woman, named Tabitha, or Dorcas, who was constantly doing good and giving to others, [1 Timothy 2:10](#) / [Titus 2:7](#), became ill and died, [Acts 9:36-37](#).

Tabitha is Aramaic, means ‘gazelle’ or ‘antelope’, but Dorcas is Greek, which means ‘doe’ or ‘roe’. Joppa, 2 Chronicles 2:16 / Jonah 1:3, was near Lydda. Peter later accompanied two men who came for him to Lydda, Acts 10:7 / Acts 10:23.

This is interesting because usually when someone died in Biblical times, the bereaved would usually anoint the body for their burial, Mark 16:1. But here Luke tells us that the brethren simply washed her body and laid it in an upper room, Acts 9:37.

And the reason I find that interesting is that instead of getting her body ready for her burial, maybe they thought that Peter could actually bring her back to life.

And so they sent two men to Lydda to plead with Peter to come as soon as possible, Acts 9:38. And when Peter arrived, the brethren took him to the upper room, Acts 1:13, where her body lay, and she was surrounded by weeping widows who showed him some of her beautiful works, Acts 9:39 / Mark 5:38-43.

“Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, “Tabitha, get up.” She opened her eyes and, seeing Peter, she sat up. He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called the believers and the widows and presented her to them alive”. Acts 9:40-41

How many times have we seen the example of the apostles praying first before they do anything? Peter sent everyone out of the room, knelt down and prayed, Acts 9:40.

I wonder if he remembers the time when Jesus raised Lazarus back to life? John 11:38-44. Because in much the same fashion as he had seen the Lord do, Peter called for Tabitha to ‘arise’, Acts 9:40 / Mark 5:38-43 / Luke 8:50-56 / John 11:43.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The wonder of wonders is that God in heaven answered the prayer of the faithful apostle, and Dorcas was recalled from the dead. Not only does this mighty sign bear a validity and relevance in its own right; but it is also, in context, a corroborative thunder echoing the events in the house of Jairus, before the gates of Nain, and at the tomb of Lazarus!’

And she opened her eyes, saw Peter and sat up, and Peter extended his hand to her and helped her up while calling for the brethren to come, Acts 9:40-41 / 1 Kings 17:23.

What an incredible event this must have been to witness as Peter exercises the authority to raise people back to life he received from Christ, Matthew 10:8. And I don’t know about you, but I couldn’t keep an event like that to myself; I would have to tell others. And that’s exactly what Luke tells us happened next.

“This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord. Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon.” Acts 9:42-43

Because God was working miracles through the apostle Peter, the miracles did what they were designed to do during those days, John 20:30-31. Many people from all over Joppa, Acts 9:32 / Acts 9:41, believed God’s word as He spoke through Peter, and they too became Christians, Acts 9:42 / John 12:11 / Acts 9:35 / Acts 11:21 / Acts 15:19.

And so Peter stayed for a time in Joppa at the house of Simon the tanner, Acts 9:43. A tanner was regarded as unclean to a Jew. It appears the Lord was preparing Peter for what was about to happen in the next chapter concerning the Gentiles.

CHAPTER 10

INTRODUCTION

“At Caesarea, there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly”. Acts 10:1-2

In the previous chapter, we saw how a young Jewish Rabbi named Saul changed his life around from being a persecutor of the Lord’s church to becoming a preacher for the Lord’s church, and he became more welcoming toward people.

The city of Caesarea was an important seaport, and it was the centre of the Roman government and armed forces for the area. The city’s people were made up of both Greeks and Jews, but they sometimes never saw eye to eye with each other. And it’s in Caesarea that Luke introduces us to a man named Cornelius, [Acts 10:1](#).

Luke says that he was of the Italian regiment, [Acts 10:1](#), which would have numbered between six hundred and one thousand. Cornelius was a centurion, which basically meant he was the commander of a hundred men.

Luke also tells us about his religious life, too. He says that Cornelius was a devout, God-fearing man who prayed and gave generous gifts to those who might have been in need, [Acts 10:2](#). He recognised God in heaven, and he knew that the Jews were God’s people, [Luke 7:5](#).

Not only was he a God-fearing man, but his whole household was God-fearing people too, [Acts 10:2](#). Cornelius is going to become the first Gentile convert, [Matthew 8:11](#) / [Matthew 16:19](#).

I read a couple of commentaries on this passage, and it appears that when Luke records that Cornelius’ whole family were God-fearing people.’ This was used to describe a person who believed in the God of Abraham but had refused to be circumcised.

How accurate that statement is, I’m not sure, but I thought I would bring it to our attention because if we remember, we saw Stephen accusing the Sanhedrin of having circumcision in the flesh but uncircumcised hearts, [Acts 7:51](#) / [Romans 2:25-29](#) / [Colossians 2:11](#). Here is a man who wasn’t circumcised in the flesh but seems to be circumcised where it matters most, in his heart, [Matthew 22:37-39](#).

CORNELIUS CALLS FOR PETER

“One day, at about three in the afternoon, he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, “Cornelius!” Cornelius stared at him in fear. “What is it, Lord?” he asked. The angel answered, “Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon, who is called Peter. He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea.” When the angel who spoke to him had gone, Cornelius called two of his servants and a devout soldier who was one of his attendants. He told them everything that had happened and sent them to Joppa.” Acts 10:3-8

This is interesting because Cornelius prayed at three in the afternoon, [Acts 10:3](#) / [Acts 10:30](#), which we know was the ninth hour and a Jewish hour of prayer, [Psalms 55:17](#). And it’s then that an angel appeared to Cornelius in a vision, [Acts 10:3](#) / [Acts 10:30](#).

Let me make an important point here about angels. We’re living in a society that is obsessed with angels, and I have spoken with some people who claim to have had a visit from one.

There are cards and wrapping paper, signs and symbols and ornaments of these cute little things with halos, wings and nice little faces that are as sweet as they could be.

I don't think we should be thinking that in our minds when we read the word 'angel' in the Bible. 2 Kings 19:35 tells us that just one of God's angels killed one hundred and eighty-five thousand of God's enemies in one moment. These are mighty creatures, and in Scripture they had three basic functions: to worship, to witness and to wage warfare. Whatever they look like, they put you down on the ground in terror, and that's what happened to Cornelius because he was afraid, Acts 10:4. But the angel reassures the frightened centurion by telling him God positively received his sacrifices, Acts 10:4.

To prove that God accepted his sacrifices, the angel told Cornelius to send men to Joppa to call for Simon Peter at the house of a tanner named Simon, Acts 10:5-6 / Acts 9:43, which was around thirty miles away.

He obeyed God like all people should obey God and dispatched two servants and a religious soldier to the city of Joppa, Acts 10:7-8 / Acts 10:33. Not only did God want Cornelius to know that what he was doing was acceptable to God, but God wanted to let someone else know that something else was acceptable to Him, the Gentiles, that is, Peter.

PETER'S VISION

"About noon the following day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. Then a voice told him, 'Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.'" "Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean." The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven". Acts 10:9-16

Peter is going to have to do something very unpopular; he is now going to open the door for the Gentiles, Matthew 8:11 / Matthew 16:19. It was during another time of prayer while Cornelius' servants were on their way to Peter that we find him praying to God at the top of Simon's house, Acts 10:9 / Psalms 55:17.

Luke tells us he became very hungry while preparations for the noon meal were being made, and he fell into a trance, Acts 10:10 / Numbers 24:4 / Numbers 24:16. Notice that Peter is finding it difficult to explain what he saw. He says he saw heaven open and 'something like' a sheet being let down out of heaven, Acts 10:11.

As mentioned back in Acts 2:2-3, it wasn't literally a violent wind they heard; it wasn't literally tongues of fire. And here, Peter didn't literally see a sheet being let down out of heaven, he says it was 'something like a sheet'.

This sheet which Peter saw being let down from heaven was full of all types of unclean animals and it's then that Peter hears a voice telling him to kill and eat, Acts 10:12-13 / 1 Timothy 4:4.

Peter being a devout Jew refused the instructions because he didn't want to defile himself, Acts 10:14 / Ezekiel 4:14 / Matthew 16:22 / John 13:8. If Peter had remembered the Lord's word as He spoke in Mark's Gospel, he wouldn't have had any problems with the instructions, Mark 7:14-19.

The voice which Peter heard was in full agreement with the Lord's teachings in Mark 7. The voice told Peter that nothing God had made should be described by man as common or unclean, Acts 10:15 / 1 Timothy 4:4.

It's also interesting that the same vision was repeated three times before the sheet was taken out of the apostle's sight, Acts 10:16. Do you remember in Matthew 26:34-35, just before Jesus was arrested?

Peter was basically saying to Jesus, 'I will never leave you, Lord, I will never betray you, Lord, I will never deny you, Lord.' But he did, didn't he? Three times, in fact, Matthew 26:69-70 / Matthew 26:71-74 / Luke 22:59-62.

I don't believe that Peter ever forgot that day in his heart, as the cock crowd and I don't believe that Jesus was going to let him forget that day either, hence why He asked Peter if he loved Him three times, John 21:15-17.

I don't know if there is any connection between the three denials of Peter and Jesus asking him three times if he loves Him. But, interestingly, this vision he received here was given three times too, Acts 10:16. But not only that, as we will see in a moment, Peter is about to get three visitors.

Boice, in his commentary, says the following.

‘By the time the drama had been acted out the third time, Peter must have begun to get the idea that God was trying to tell him something, even though he did not know exactly what it was.’

Longenecker, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The particular application had to do with nullifying Jewish dietary laws for Christians in accord with Jesus’ remarks on the subject in Mark 7:17-23. But Peter was soon to learn that the range of the vision’s message extended much more widely, touching directly on Jewish-Gentile relations as he had known them and on those relations in ways he could never have anticipated.’

The vision which Peter received was important for him to understand because God had it in His mind to save other people from going to hell. But as we are about to read, Peter doesn't understand the vision just yet.

“While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon’s house was and stopped at the gate. They called out, asking if Simon, who was known as Peter, was staying there. While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Simon, three men are looking for you. So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them.” Acts 10:17-19

Luke tells us that as Peter was thinking about the vision, the men from Cornelius arrived at the house and began to inquire about him, Acts 10:17-18. And then the Holy Spirit told him to go with the three men because they were sent by the Spirit, Acts 10:19. These three men turning up wasn't a coincidence; they were sent by God for a specific reason.

Peter didn't even know they were coming; he didn't even know they were at Simon's house until the Spirit told him they were there. Our God knows our needs because He is always aware of them. He knows when our heart needs encouragement, He knows when our heart is beginning to doubt, 1 John 3:20.

Peter didn't know why these men came looking for him, but when God's Spirit told him to go downstairs, he went and found out why they had come, Acts 10:20.

“Peter went down and said to the men, “I’m the one you’re looking for. Why have you come?” The men replied, “We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to have you come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say.” Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests. The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa went along”. Acts 10:20-23

Luke tells us that Peter went down and told the men he was the man they were looking and they, in turn, told Peter that Cornelius had been told by God, through the agency of an angel, to send for Peter so that he could hear him preach, Acts 10:20-21 / Acts 10:7.

Peter realised that this message wasn't a coincidence, it was indeed from God Himself, Acts 10:22. Peter then invited them in to spend the night, to eat the very meal with them which was being prepared while he saw the vision, Acts 10:23 / Romans 12:13 / Hebrews 13:1-2.

Boice, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Normally, a Jew would have said, ‘Well, it is nice to meet you, but we need to stay out here in the street. You can't come inside.’ Or he might have said, ‘If you go down the street a little way, I think you'll find an inn where you can stay.’ No orthodox Jew would have invited Gentiles into his house. He would not have sat down at the same table with them. He would not have had fellowship with them. It was forbidden.’

Witherington, in his commentary, says the following.

‘There may also be some intended irony here, since Peter had earlier protested his scrupulousness about food, all the while staying in the house of a man whose trade made him unclean!’

The next morning, Peter and some other brethren set out for Caesarea, [Acts 10:23](#).

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘As an act of prudent foresight, Peter took the precaution of taking witnesses with him. He no doubt anticipated that what would be done in Caesarea might lead to misunderstandings and disputes, unless every word and act should be certified by competent witnesses. Significantly, the guidance of God’s Spirit did not diminish Peter’s responsibility to act prudently in all things.’

Some commentators have suggested that Peter’s hospitality to the three messengers in Joppa suggests that he had already worked out God’s intent for him to preach to the Gentiles. But others believe that the text doesn’t tell us if Peter fully understands the meaning of his visions yet; he is possibly still giving it some thought.

PETER AT CORNELIUS’S HOUSE

“The following day, he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. But Peter made him get up. “Stand up,” he said, “I am only a man myself.” [Acts 10:24-26](#)

I don’t know about you, but I don’t think I have ever met anyone whom I consider worthy of my falling to my knees, with the exception of Jesus Christ, of course.

But when Cornelius met the apostle Peter, he bowed down before him, but rather than just accepting such adoration or encouraging it in any way, Peter told Cornelius to get up because he too was a man, [Acts 10:24-26](#) / [Revelation 19:10](#) / [Revelation 22:8-9](#).

Stott, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Peter refused both to be treated by Cornelius as if he were a god, and to treat Cornelius as if he were a dog.’

Paul and Barnabas wouldn’t accept worship from them because they recognised that they too were only humans, [Acts 14:11-15](#); they too, like Peter, knew where to draw the line.

Peter knew where to draw the line, and he understood that he was an apostle of Christ, but he also remembered where he came from. He was a humble fisherman who became a servant for Christ, but he was still a human being.

He wouldn’t allow anyone to place him high above anyone else, [Mark 10:45](#). Peter understood what it meant to be humble; that’s why he wouldn’t accept any bowing down from Cornelius, [Acts 10:26](#) / [1 Peter 5:5](#).

He also recognises that if Cornelius and his household are going to receive him, he wants them to remember that he was simply a servant, sent to them by God. And so Luke goes on to inform us what happened when Peter went inside Cornelius’ house.

“Talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. He said to them: “You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?” Cornelius answered: “Four days ago, I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly, a man in shining clothes stood before me and said, ‘Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor. Send to Joppa for Simon, who is called Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner,

who lives by the sea.’ So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us. I now realise how true it is that God does not show favouritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.” Acts 10:27-35

Peter has finally understood the meaning behind the visions. Peter says that he shouldn’t even be here with these guys because they are Gentiles, [Acts 10:27-28](#), ‘but God’ has different plans. And so now this God-fearing centurion named Cornelius, his family and friends opened their hearts to receive the Lord’s commands from Peter.

I love those two little words, ‘but God’, [Acts 10:28](#), because it tells me that God is always one step ahead of my thinking. Paul says, you know, maybe a good friend might die for you to show that they love you, ‘but God’ proved that He loves you because Christ died for us, [Romans 5:7-8](#). Paul says you know Epaphroditus almost died, ‘but God’ had different plans for him, [Philippians 2:27](#).

Cornelius then related the vision he had seen to Peter, [Acts 10:30-33](#). The angel in Cornelius’ vision, [Acts 10:2](#), had looked like a man dressed in shining garments, [Acts 10:30](#). The vision God had given him was a response to the centurion’s prayers and alms, [Acts 10:2](#).

Peter was taught a powerful lesson from God, a lesson that God had been trying to teach His people for generations. The lesson which Peter had to learn was that acceptability to God no longer depended on national descent, but upon character, [Acts 10:34-35](#) / [Deuteronomy 10:17](#) / [2 Chronicles 19:7](#) / [Job 34:19](#) / [Amos 9:7](#) / [Micah 6:8](#).

In other words, we don’t need to become a Jew to please God. There is no such thing as a superior race in Christianity, [Matthew 28:18-20](#) / [John 10:16](#) / [Galatians 3:26-28](#).

Do you remember in [Matthew 16](#) when Jesus asked the disciples who the people thought Jesus was, and then Jesus asked Peter who He thought He was, and Peter said that Jesus was the Christ? Notice that Jesus says, ‘I will give you the keys’, plural, [Matthew 16:18-19](#).

We all know what keys are used for; they are either used for locking or opening something up. In this case, the keys were to be used to open the way back to the Father.

In [Acts 2](#) when Peter first preached, he used one of those keys to open the way back to the Father for the Jews. And what we’re about to see happening here is Peter using the other key to open the way back to the Father for the Gentiles.

“You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached- how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him. “We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen, by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.” Acts 10:36-43

Peter never got tired of preaching the Gospel; he began his sermon by preaching the simple Gospel message he had already proclaimed to so many Jews. Peter’s sermon is the first sermon in Acts addressed to a Gentile audience, [Acts 14:15-17](#) / [Acts 17:22-31](#).

Peter says first of all, the Jews had learned that Jesus was the means of man obtaining peace with God and his fellow man and for that to happen, Jesus had to be Lord or master, overall, [Acts 10:36](#). This is interesting because when you read the text, it comes across as if Peter presumed they had already heard of the preaching of Jesus, which had spread through Judea and Galilee, beginning with the message of the forerunner, John the baptizer, [Acts 10:37](#) / [Luke 3:21-22](#).

Peter presumed that they knew about how Jesus was God's anointed and had performed numerous acts of kindness and healing, [Acts 10:38](#).

And he tells Cornelius and those listening that he and the other apostles stood as witnesses of the good Jesus did and the terrible trial the Jewish leaders put Him through, [Acts 3:15](#) / [Acts 4:10](#) / [Acts 5:30](#) / [Acts 7:52](#) / [Acts 4:27](#), followed by His death on the cross, [Acts 10:38](#) / [Isaiah 61:1](#) / [Luke 4:14-30](#) / [Acts 2:32](#) / [Acts 3:15](#) / [Acts 5:32](#) / [Acts 10:41](#) / [Acts 13:30-31](#).

He goes on to tell them that they could also testify that God raised Him up and made Him known to certain witnesses, some of whom even ate with him, [Acts 10:39-41](#) / [Luke 24:41-43](#) / [Acts 1:8](#).

Boice, in his commentary, says the following.

'Peter stresses eating and drinking with Christ because that is a way of saying that Christ's was a real resurrection.'

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'This is the heart of Christianity. If this is not relevant to every man on earth, then nothing is relevant. The facts in view here are the cornerstone and foundation of all faith and doctrine in Christ. This is the essential theme that both launched and sustained the triumph of Christianity over the pagan religions of antiquity. The apostles did not preach what they had merely heard, but what they had heard and seen.'

And then finally, he tells those listening that the apostles were given the commission to testify that Jesus would ultimately judge both the living and the dead, [Acts 10:42](#) / [Matthew 28:19-20](#) / [Mark 16:15-16](#) / [Acts 17:31](#).

Spurgeon, in his commentary, says the following.

'The apostle was not long in his address before he came to the doctrine of the judgment of all men by Jesus Christ. He says that he was commanded to preach it, and therefore he did preach it.'

Peter says, even the prophets had referred to the coming Messiah through whom those believing in his name could receive the remission of their sins, [Acts 10:43](#). However, Peter is in the middle of a sentence when something truly miraculous happens.

"While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God." [Acts 10:44-46](#)

Luke says that Peter was in full flow with his sermon when all of a sudden these Gentiles, who had never gotten rid of their uncleanness through circumcision and sacrifice, were speaking in tongues and magnifying the name of God, [Acts 10:44](#).

Peter and the other six brothers who came with Peter, [Acts 11:22](#), were astonished, [Acts 10:45](#). They were astonished because they heard them speaking in tongues, that is, a different language not studied and praising God, [Acts 10:46](#) / [Acts 11:15-16](#) / [1 Corinthians 14:2](#).

Please note, they received one of the 'gifts' of the Spirit, that is, tongue speaking, [1 Corinthians 14:2](#), not the 'gift' of the Holy Spirit Himself who indwells within a Christian at their baptism as promised in [Acts 2:38](#).

Peter says that they had received 'the gift of the Holy Spirit', [Acts 10:45](#). Notice also that the Holy Spirit came before Cornelius and his house had been baptised, [Acts 10:44](#).

What Cornelius received was not the gift promised to those who repent and are baptised, the indwelling presence of the Spirit, [Acts 2:38](#) / [Acts 5:32](#). He had not been baptised at this point.

This wasn't the promise of the 'gift of the Holy Spirit' given to all who are baptised, [Acts 2:38](#) / [Acts 5:32](#). They would receive the promised gift of the Holy Spirit, the indwelling presence of the Spirit when they were baptised, [Acts 10:48](#).

In [Acts 2:38](#), the gift of the Holy Spirit was promised after repentance, baptism in Jesus' name, and the forgiveness of sins. And so, we see a clear distinction between salvation and receiving the Spirit with His miraculous power in [Acts 2:38](#). [Acts 2:38](#) and [Titus 3:5-6](#) show us that salvation was not by receiving 'the Gift of the Holy Spirit', but that the Gift followed salvation.

Remember that the Jews thought that no one else was acceptable to God unless they were a Jew. This event clearly shows us that God has other plans. This event shows us that the Gentiles could now enter the church through baptism without first submitting to the requirements of the Law of Moses.

"Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have." So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days." [Acts 10:47-48](#)

We don't have to wonder what this event means. Peter understood fully well what this event meant. He drew the obvious conclusion and asked how anyone could forbid these Gentiles the opportunity to obey Christ by putting Christ on in baptism, [Acts 10:47](#) / [Genesis 12:1-4](#) / [Isaiah 60:1-3](#) / [Matthew 8:5-13](#) / [Matthew 28:18-20](#) / [Mark 16:15-16](#) / [John 10:16](#) / [John 12:32](#) / [Acts 2:38](#) / [Romans 6:3-5](#).

And notice when God gives a command, people need to obey it. Luke says that after the entire group had obeyed the Lord, they asked Peter and his companions to stay for a few days, [Acts 10:48](#).

CONTRAST WATER BAPTISM WITH HOLY SPIRIT BAPTISM

1. Water baptism is for 'all Nations' and is required of every creature who is subject to the Gospel, [Matthew 28:19-20](#) / [Mark 16:15-16](#) / [Galatians 3:26-29](#).

1. Holy Spirit baptism was poured out once upon the apostles. Jesus promised the apostles that the Spirit of Truth, which the world cannot receive, [John 14:17](#) / [Luke 24:46ff](#), would 'guide them into all truth'.

2. Water baptism is a command of God, [Matthew 28:19](#) / [Acts 2:38](#) / [Acts 10:48](#) / [Acts 22:16](#).

2. Holy Spirit baptism was a promise of God fulfilled in [Acts 2:4](#), and since coming into the world, He is now available to indwell His people, [Acts 2:38](#) / [Titus 3:6](#). The Power was given to apostles, as the Spirit willed, [Mark 9:1](#) / [Mark 16:17](#) / [1 Corinthians 12:11](#).

3. Water baptism is an act of obedience and an act of man, [Acts 2:38](#) / [Acts 10:48](#) / [Acts 22:16](#), and is 'for the forgiveness of sins'.

3. Holy Spirit baptism was an act of God, not an act of man, [Acts 1:5](#) / [Acts 2:4](#), and was not for salvation, but given to confirm the word, [Hebrews 2:4](#).

4. Water baptism is administered by men or by those doing the teaching, [1 Corinthians 1:14](#).

4. Holy Spirit baptism was to be given by Jesus. [Matthew 3:11](#) / [John 1:33](#) / [Acts 2:4](#).

5. Water baptism is a condition of salvation, [Mark 16:15-16](#) / [1 Peter 3:21](#) / [Hebrews 9:14](#).

5. Holy Spirit baptism was not related to salvation.

6. Water baptism is 'INTO the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit', [Matthew 28:19](#) / [Acts 2:38](#) / [Acts 8:14-16](#) / [Acts 22:16](#) / [1 Corinthians 6:11](#).

6. Holy Spirit baptism had no formula because it wasn't performed by man, [Matthew 3:11](#).

7. Water baptism demonstrates the believer's faith, [Galatians 3:26-27](#) / [Mark 16:15-16](#) / [Colossians 2:12](#).

7. Holy Spirit baptism was not a human act and did not require faith, [Matthew 3:11](#) / [John 1:33](#).

8. Water baptism represents the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, [Colossians 2:12](#) / [Romans 6:1-6](#).
8. Holy Spirit baptism had no such symbolism. It was the indication of the bestowal of ‘authority’ and the ‘power’ which accompanies authority, [Acts 1:5](#) / [Acts 2:4](#) / [Acts 2:17](#) / [Acts 2:38](#).
9. Water baptism is a baptism of repentance that is, it belongs to and grows out of repentance, [Mark 1:4](#) / [Luke 13:3](#) / [Acts 19:4](#) / [Acts 2:38](#).
9. Holy Spirit baptism came before the first Gospel sermon of Peter, [Mark 1:4](#) / [Luke 7:29-30](#) / [Acts 1:5](#) / [Acts 2:4](#).
10. Water baptism is a condition of cleansing from sin, [Acts 22:16](#) / [Ephesians 5:25-27](#) / [John 8:31-32](#).
10. Holy Spirit baptism came along after the apostles were cleansed by the word. [John 15:3](#), not for cleansing but to confirm, [Hebrews 2:4](#).
11. Water baptism puts one into Christ, [Romans 6:1-4](#) / [Galatians 3:26-27](#).
11. Holy Spirit baptism was poured out after the apostles were already in Christ, and had been urged to ‘abide’ in Him, [John 15:1-6](#) / [Acts 2:1-4](#).
12. Water baptism was in order to receive the gift of the Spirit, [Acts 2:38](#) / [Acts 5:32](#).
12. Holy Spirit baptism was the one-time act of the coming of the Spirit into the world, [1 John 2:2](#) / [1 Timothy 2:6](#) / [Hebrews 2:9](#). Just as Jesus’ blood was shed as a one-time act but has an ongoing benefit for all. Power was to cease when the message was confirmed, [1 Corinthians 13:1-9](#).
13. Water baptism must continue even to the end of the age, [Matthew 28:19-20](#).
13. Holy Spirit baptism was a one-time event. No two baptisms were known after the Ephesian letter was written, [Ephesians 4:5](#).

DID CORNELIUS AND HIS HOUSEHOLD RECEIVE HOLY SPIRIT BAPTISM?

I have heard many people claim that Holy Spirit baptism is still happening today, and they use the events of Cornelius’ household as proof. I believe that Holy Spirit baptism was an experience unique to the first century. And so let me try to explain why.

As any good Bible student should do, we need to ask the question, what was its purpose? Centuries before the birth of Jesus, the prophet Joel in [Joel 2:28-29](#) foretold of a time when the Holy Spirit would be poured out upon ‘all flesh’ or ‘all people’ as some translations have it.

The expression ‘all flesh’ is not related to every human being because even animals have flesh. The phrase ‘all flesh’ merely embodies the two major segments of humanity, from that ancient vantage point. In other words, the Jews and the Gentiles.

On the day of Pentecost, Peter quoted Joel’s prophetic declaration, remember in [Acts 2:16-21](#). And when he did that, he was revealing that the prophecy was ‘beginning’ to enjoy its fulfilment that very day. When Peter and his Jewish brothers visited the family of Cornelius in the city of Caesarea.

The Spirit of God was ‘poured out’ on Cornelius, his family, and near friends at that time, [Acts 10:45](#). Later, when Peter defended their acceptance of the Gentiles to the Jewish church, and then he identified the Caesarean experience with the events that occurred ‘at the beginning’, [Acts 11:15-17](#). In other words, he says what happened to us on Pentecost happened to Cornelius’ household.

Let’s get back to the question: what was its purpose? Why did the apostles receive the Holy Spirit? The purpose for which the apostles received the Spirit on the day of Pentecost was unique, [Acts 2:1-4](#).

Remember the Lord promised His apostles that ‘they’ would receive an unparalleled measure of the Spirit’s power to ‘guide them’ in teaching the Gospel.

The Spirit would bring to their memories the things ‘they’ had learned from the Saviour, John 14:26. He would guide ‘them’ into all truth and declare unto them things to come, John 16:13.

The Lord promised ‘they’ would be able to proclaim His message, unfettered by the need for personal preparation; rather, Gospel truth would be ‘given’ to ‘them’ as ‘they’ required it, Matthew 10:19-20.

Now here’s the important question we must ask ourselves. Was this another instance of the baptism of the Holy Spirit? I recall, a few years ago, being taught that the baptism of the Holy Spirit occurred twice during the New Testament period, once in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost when the first Jews obeyed the Gospel, and once at Caesarea when the first Gentiles became Christians.

That explanation was both simple and satisfactory because it dealt very effectively with many of the arguments made by so-called ‘Pentecostal’ and ‘Charismatic’ groups, who continue to claim to be baptised in the Holy Spirit.

I don’t believe that this explains what happened in the house of Cornelius. I don’t think that this was a second occurrence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. We must ask ourselves the question, to whom was the baptism of the Holy Spirit promised and why was it promised?

1. It was personally promised by the Lord to ‘His apostles’ and never promised to anyone else, John 16:7. Cornelius wasn’t an apostle.
2. Those to whom it was promised were instructed ‘to wait’ to receive it, Acts 1:4-5.
3. When ‘they’ received the baptism, it would guide ‘them’ into all truth, ‘they’ would receive new revelations, and ‘they’ would be granted total recall of all that ‘they’ had been taught by the Lord, John 14:26 / John 16:13-14.
4. ‘Their’ baptism in the Spirit would endow ‘them’ with power and bestow on ‘them’ the authority to become His witnesses, Acts 1:8-9.

On the Day of Pentecost, the Lord’s promise was fulfilled, Acts 2:33. The Holy Spirit fell on ‘the apostles’, not on the listening Jews, nor on the 3000 who obeyed the Gospel. But, in contrast, in the house of Cornelius, the Spirit fell upon the listening Gentiles.

The two events are obviously quite different, and the only point of similarity is the fact that on the Day of Pentecost, in the house of Cornelius, the Holy Spirit signalled His presence and approval by enabling these seeking Gentiles to speak in languages they had not learned.

1. They received the forgiveness of their sins, Acts 2:38 / Acts 10:48, and they received the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, God’s own gift to those who obey Him, Acts 2:38 / Acts 5:32.

There is no Biblical evidence that Cornelius or his household had the teaching powers as the apostles did. There’s no Biblical evidence to suggest that they could lay their hands upon other people and pass on spiritual gifts as the apostles could, Acts 8:5-6 / Acts 8:14-19 / Acts 19:6 / 1 Timothy 4:14.

The purpose of Cornelius being granted the Spirit was to demonstrate to the Jews that God was ready for the Gospel to be offered to the Gentiles. This was evidenced by the fact that even Peter initially resisted the idea that the Gentiles could become Christians, as we saw in Acts 10:14-22.

This was also evident in the fact that the Jews of Jerusalem, when they learned of the matter, criticised Peter, Acts 11:2-3. It was the miraculous demonstration of the Spirit upon Cornelius and his associates that turned the tide. And the effect of this divine act of Gentile acceptance remains intact to this very day.

Holy Spirit baptism is not necessary to one’s salvation today, nor is it a demonstration of our salvation. It was a phenomenon of the first century, unique to those circumstances.

When Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesians in A.D. 62, he confirmed that there was but ‘one baptism’, Ephesians 4:5. Clearly, he’s talking about ‘water’ baptism, the very practice that was to continue ‘to the end of the age’ as Jesus commanded, Matthew 28:19-20.

The point of the pouring out of the Spirit here was simply to demonstrate that the Gentiles can now be a part of God’s kingdom. The Jews didn’t think that anyone else was acceptable to God unless they had been circumcised in the flesh and had been converted to Judaism, and so, God was demonstrating otherwise.

CHAPTER 11

INTRODUCTION

“The apostles and the brothers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticised him and said, “You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them.” Acts 11:1-3

In the previous chapter, we saw how Peter in Cornelius’ household was amazed that God’s Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, Acts 10:44-46. And so Peter, who earlier had a vision, finally understood the meaning of the vision in the fact that God shows no favouritism between people, Acts 10:9-16.

He understood that we don’t have to be a Jew to please God, we don’t have to have been circumcised in the flesh to please God, Acts 10:47. But what we do need is the right heart and attitude towards God by obeying His commands from the heart, Acts 10:48.

Here, Peter is trying to explain to other circumcised Jews that God accepts Gentiles, Acts 11:1. In other words, the Gentiles could enter the church through baptism without first submitting to the requirements of the Law of Moses. It seems as though news of the events in Cornelius’ house reached Jerusalem and the apostles, even, apparently, before Peter made his way back to the city, Acts 11:1.

Before the baptism of Cornelius and his household, everyone who had been baptised had been subject to the Law of Moses and circumcision, whether they were of the fleshly Israel or proselytes.

And so Luke tells us there was a bit of a dispute which arose from some of that number and Peter, Acts 11:2. They did not understand why he had gone into the house of a Gentile and actually eaten there, Acts 11:3 / Acts 10:23 / Acts 11:12 / Galatians 2:12.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The complaint against Peter does not seem to have been that he had baptised a Gentile, but that he had baptised a Gentile without first requiring him to submit to circumcision and come under the law of Moses.’

PETER EXPLAINS HIS ACTIONS

“Peter began and explained everything to them precisely as it had happened: “I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. I saw something like a large sheet being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to where I was. I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, reptiles, and birds of the air. Then I heard a voice telling me, ‘Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.’ “I replied, ‘Surely not, Lord! Nothing impure

or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’ “The voice spoke from heaven a second time, ‘Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.’ This happened three times, and then it was all pulled up to heaven again. “Right then, three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea stopped at the house where I was staying. The Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them. These six brothers also went with me, and we entered the man’s house”. Acts 11:4-

12

Peter basically explains his visions, which happened back in Acts 10:9-43. If we take one lesson from this text, it would be this: Peter’s answer teaches us a great deal about resolving controversy within the church.

He defended his actions by saying they were authorised and approved by God. Peter not only went back to the source, but he also revealed to those disputing believers how this authority was shown.

He told them he had seen a vision that indicated to him that he should no longer regard any other man as common, Ephesians 2:11-18, and he says he heard the Spirit tell him to go with the three men who had been sent from Caesarea, Acts 4:4-10. Peter did what we must all do when our authority tells us to do something, and so, he went to Caesarea, accompanied by six other brethren, Acts 11:11-12.

“He told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, ‘Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.’” Acts 11:13-14

Peter begins to move away from explaining his vision to explaining Cornelius’ vision. Peter related the story of the vision which Cornelius had, which directed him to send for Peter so that he could hear words that would save him and his household, Acts 10:3-8.

Notice what Peter says here; he doesn’t say that Cornelius and his household were saved because the Holy Spirit came upon them. He doesn’t say that Cornelius was saved because he had a vision.

He doesn’t say that Cornelius was saved because he was a good person. He doesn’t even say that Cornelius and his household were saved when they heard Peter’s message. No, he says that salvation was to be theirs only ‘after’ they had ‘heard’ and ‘obeyed’ the words spoken.

In other words, when they had heard the instructions and then followed them by obeying them step by step, they would have the finished product, which was salvation.

“As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. Then I remembered what the Lord had said: ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God? When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, “So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life.” Acts 11:15-18

And so Peter follows on with his explanation about what happened when he met up with Cornelius and his household. He says to them that ‘the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning,’ Acts 11:15 / Luke 24:46-47.

What does he mean? There is absolutely no doubt that Peter is referring to the day of Pentecost when the apostles received the Holy Spirit and spoke in other languages, Acts 2:1-4. Peter says Cornelius and his household received the gift of tongues in the same way they did in the beginning, through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

With that evidence, and remembering what the Lord said, Acts 11:16 / Mark 1:8 / Acts 1:5, Peter didn’t feel that he could oppose God by refusing to baptise them, or in any other way place stiffer requirements on these Gentiles, Acts 11:17 / Galatians 6:13.

Peter’s arguments convinced all assembled that the Gentiles had also been given the right to eternal life if they would submit to the Saviour in repentant baptism, Isaiah 49:6.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following concerning Acts 11:18.

‘The New Testament speaks of faith being ‘unto’ righteousness, **Romans 10:10**, repentance being ‘unto’ life, **Acts 11:18**, and confession being ‘unto’ salvation, **Romans 10:10**, it is of baptism alone that the word of God declares it to be ‘into Christ’, **Romans 6:3** / **Galatians 3:27**, and ‘into one body’, **1 Corinthians 12:13**.’

We must remind ourselves of the question we asked in the previous chapter: Who was the baptism of the Holy Spirit promised, and why was it promised?

1. It was personally promised by the Lord to ‘His apostles’ and never promised to anyone else, **John 16:7**. Cornelius wasn’t an apostle.
2. Those to whom it was promised were instructed ‘to wait’ to receive it, **Acts 1:4-5**.
3. When ‘they received the baptism, it would guide ‘them’ into all truth, ‘they’ would receive new revelations, and ‘they’ would be granted total recall of all that ‘they’ had been taught by the Lord, **John 14:26** / **John 16:13-14**.
4. ‘Their’ baptism in the Spirit would endow ‘them’ with power and bestow on ‘them’ the authority to become His witnesses, **Acts 1:8-9**.

On the Day of Pentecost, the Lord’s promise was fulfilled, **Acts 2:33**. The Holy Spirit fell on ‘the apostles’, not on the listening Jews, nor on the three thousand who obeyed the Gospel. But, in contrast, in the house of Cornelius, the Spirit fell upon the listening Gentiles.

The two events are obviously quite different, and the only point of similarity is the fact that on the Day of Pentecost, in the house of Cornelius, the Holy Spirit signalled His presence and approval by enabling these seeking Gentiles to speak in languages they had not learned.

1. They received the forgiveness of their sins, **Acts 2:38**, and they received the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, God’s own gift to those who obey Him. **Acts 5:32**.

There is no Biblical evidence that Cornelius or his household had the teaching powers as the apostles did. There’s no Biblical evidence to suggest that they could lay their hands upon other people and pass on spiritual gifts as the apostles could.

The purpose of Cornelius being granted the Spirit was to demonstrate to the Jews that God was ready for the Gospel to be offered to the Gentiles. This was evidenced by the fact that even Peter initially resisted the idea that the Gentiles could become Christians, as we saw in **Acts 10:14-23**.

This was also evident in the fact that the Jews of Jerusalem, when they learned of the matter, criticised Peter, **Acts 11:2-3**. It was the miraculous demonstration of the Spirit upon Cornelius and his associates that turned the tide. And the effect of this divine act of Gentile acceptance remains intact to this very day.

Holy Spirit baptism is not necessary to one’s salvation today, nor is it a demonstration of our salvation. It was a phenomenon of the first century, unique to those circumstances.

When Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesians in A.D. 62, he confirmed that there was but ‘one baptism’, **Ephesians 4:5**. Clearly, he’s talking about ‘water’ baptism, the very practice that was to continue ‘to the end of the age’ as Jesus commanded, **Matthew 28:19-20**.

This chapter clearly shows us the reason why Cornelius and his household received the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit being outpoured on them wasn’t so much for Cornelius’ benefit.

In many ways, it wasn’t even for Peter’s benefit, but it was for the benefit of those to whom Peter was speaking on this day. God was sending a clear message out to the Jewish Christians who were meeting in Jerusalem that He loves and accepts Gentiles into His church.

People didn't need to be a Jew to be recommended to receive a Saviour. People didn't have to be circumcised in the flesh to be recommended to receive a Saviour. Our sin is all the recommendation we need to receive a Saviour, **Romans 3:22**.

It doesn't matter about your age, your colour, your riches or debts because we all come to the cross of Christ filthy with sin, **Romans 3:21-25**. Meanwhile, when all this praising of God was going on, **Acts 11:18**, something else was happening in the background.

THE CHURCH IN ANTIOCH

“Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen travelled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews. Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord”. **Acts 11:19-21**

Do you remember back when Luke informed Theophilus that Saul approved Stephen's death? **Acts 7:60 / Acts 8:1**. There was a great persecution happening, **Acts 8:1**, and as a result of that persecution, the church was scattered, **Acts 8:4**.

What we see happening next was the purpose for God allowing this persecution of His people to take place in the first place. The Gospel message needed to go out into all the world, **Matthew 28:19-20 / Mark 16:15-16**.

Luke reported that those scattered by the persecution at the time of Stephen's death went over a large area preaching the Word, but only to the Jews, **Acts 11:19**.

The men of Cyprus and Cyrene preached the Gospel to the Gentiles in Antioch as well, **Acts 11:20 / Acts 8**. Antioch becomes the centre of activity and outreach to the Gentiles, **Acts 11:21**. Antioch was about three hundred miles north of Jerusalem and about twenty miles inland from the Mediterranean Sea.

Bruce, in his commentary, says the following concerning Antioch.

‘The city's reputation for moral laxity was enhanced by the cult of Artemis and Apollo at Daphne, five miles distant, where the ancient Syrian worship of Astarte and her consort, with its ritual prostitution, was carried on.’

There was no doubt that God was working in the background. There is no doubt that God was with these men because Luke tells us that ‘a great number believed and turned to the Lord’, **Acts 11:21 / Isaiah 59:1 / Isaiah 66:14 / Acts 8:12 / Acts 8:35**.

McGarvey, in his commentary, says the following concerning **Acts 11:21**.

‘Turning to the Lord is a different act from believing, and is subsequent to it. As in **Acts 3:19**, where turning to the Lord follows repentance, the specific reference is to baptism, which is the turning act. Equivalent to the expression here is: ‘The Corinthians believed and were baptised’, **Acts 18:8**.’

Those young Christian converts who were scattered all over the place needed something we all need from time to time. And so Luke tells us that Barnabas, the son of Encouragement, **Acts 4:36-37 / Acts 9:26-28**, was sent to Antioch to encourage these young converts, **Acts 11:22**.

“News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.”
Acts 11:22-24

When word of the events in Antioch reached the church in Jerusalem, they sent Barnabas, **Acts 11:22**. And he encouraged all the young followers of the Lord to commit themselves to the Lord with all their hearts, **Acts 11:23**.

Luke tells us that Barnabas was a good man, full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and he was fully committed to teaching the Gospel to everyone and anyone willing to learn, **Acts 11:24**.

When we are good, full of faith and guided by God's Spirit, it will have a ripple effect. Luke says, 'a great many more people being added to the church', **Acts 11:24**.

"Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch". **Acts 11:25-26**

God blessed Barnabas' efforts so much that he needed help, and so he went to Tarsus to bring Saul back to help in this rich work, **Acts 11:25-26 / Acts 9:28-30**. Antioch was the world's third-largest city at that time, trailing only Rome and Alexandria.

And Barnabas needed help, and so Barnabas and Saul worked together with the church in Antioch for a year and were able to teach a large number of people.

Notice also that Luke records that the disciples in the city of Antioch were the first to wear the name 'Christian', **Acts 11:26**. This is the first time the word 'Christian' is used in Scripture; it is used only two other times, **Acts 26:28 / 1 Peter 4:16**. The word 'Christian' identifies us from the non-believers.

Eusebius, the famous early church historian, described a believer named Sanctus from Lyons, France, who was tortured for Jesus. As they tortured him cruelly, they hoped to get him to say something evil or blasphemous. They asked his name, and he only replied, 'I am a Christian.' 'What nation do you belong to?' He answered, 'I am a Christian.' 'What city do you live in?' "I am a Christian." His questioners began to get angry: 'Are you a slave or a free man?' 'I am a Christian' was his only reply. No matter what they asked about him, he only answered, 'I am a Christian.' This made his torturers all the more determined to break him, but they could not, and he died with the words 'I am a Christian' on his lips.' Eusebius, Church History.

This seems to be the fulfilment of God's promise to give His people a new name after Gentiles had seen God's righteousness and kings had seen His glory, **Isaiah 62:2**. How appropriate that they would now be designated as followers of the Christ, or anointed King.

What is a Christian? A Christian is someone who follows and obeys the words of Christ. Being a Christian is more than just wearing the Name; it's all about living the Name.

People should see the Name Christian in our lives, in our homes, in our speeches, in our attitudes, even in the way we suffer, **1 Peter 4:16**. Living out the Name Christian should also lead us to help others, as these Gentile Christians in Antioch are about to do.

"During this time, some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.) The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea. This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul". **Acts 11:27-30**

Luke tells us that certain prophets, who had received a miraculous gift that allowed them to speak for God, came from Jerusalem to Antioch, **Acts 11:27-28**. We're not told how he received this miraculous gift, **1 Corinthians 14:1-5**, but because Agabus came from Antioch, it's probable that Saul, who is now an apostle, laid their hands on him, **Acts 11:25-26**.

Agabus was among them, and he stood up and told the church a great famine was coming, **Acts 11:28**. Because Luke mentions that the prophecy was fulfilled in the days of Claudius, **Acts 11:28 / Acts 21:10**, that would mean that it would have taken place around 44-48 A. D.

Notice what they did, they weren't forced to give a tenth of their income, they weren't forced to give to the extent that they couldn't look after themselves. Luke says that each Christian, 'as he was able to', gave to send relief to the brethren still living in the area around Jerusalem, **Acts 11:29 / 1 Corinthians 16:2 / 2 Corinthians 9:7**.

Do you notice anything interesting about who they sent their offering to? The money was taken to the elders and not the apostles. Why? The reason their gifts went to the elders and not the apostles was that the apostles still had work to do, **Acts 6:3-4**.

This is the first mention of elders of the church in the New Testament; they must have met the requirements for being an elder as written by Paul, **1 Timothy 3:2-7 / Titus 1:6-8**. It was agreed that the offering would be taken to the elders in Jerusalem to be distributed to any Christian in need, **Acts 11:30**.

Boice, in his commentary, says the following.

'As far as I know, this is the first charitable act of this nature in all recorded history, one race of people collecting money to help another people. No wonder they were first called Christians at Antioch.'

CHAPTER 12

INTRODUCTION

"It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover." **Acts 12:1-4**

In the previous chapter, we saw that in Antioch the followers of Christ were first given the name Christian, and we learned that the name Christian means more than a name, **Acts 11:26**. It's not just a title we wear, but it is a way of life, our every breath and action should declare to the world that we belong to Christ.

Some people are not afraid of dying, but most people are afraid of how they are going to die. And what Luke tells us here is a prime example of a person dying for the cause of Christ.

He tells us that sometime near the time when Barnabas and Saul were taking the gift from Antioch to Jerusalem, Herod Agrippa, **Matthew 2:1-16 / Luke 23:7-12**, decided to inflict pain on certain members of the Lord's church, **Acts 12:1 / Mark 10:35-40**.

What Herod Agrippa is doing is going for the churches' leadership, the apostles. He first had James, John's brother, taken captive and killed with the sword, **Acts 12:2 / Matthew 17:1 / Matthew 26:37 / Mark 5:37 / Mark 9:2 / Mark 14:33 / Luke 5:37 / Luke 9:2 / Luke 14:33**.

We know that James' death must have occurred somewhere near 44 A. D., since that is the year Herod Agrippa I died. Note that there is no attempt to replace the apostle James. It was not death but transgression that removed Judas, **Acts 1:25**.

Remember that Herod was not only a king to the Jews, but he was also a very good politician. And because of his good connections in Rome, he was the last king to unite with the Jewish territories.

Luke tells us that because Herod saw that Jews loved him for killing James, and it had some political advantages, he immediately had Peter imprisoned, intending to put him to death as well, **Acts 12:3-5**.

Peter's imprisonment was around the time of Passover, Acts 12:4, which lasted for some eight days. The Feast of Unleavened Bread was a seven-day celebration that began on the day after Passover each spring, Acts 12:3. While Herod waited for the conclusion of the Passover, he had sixteen soldiers, divided into four groups of four, to watch the apostle in the prison, Acts 12:4 / Acts 5:17-21. Make no mistake about it, King Herod had a plan; he planned to publicly execute Peter at the conclusion of the feast.

“So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him”. Acts 12:5

We don't know what Peter was thinking as he waited, but we do know what others were thinking while they were waiting, Acts 12:5. Perhaps Peter's mind went back to the Passover he enjoyed with Jesus, Luke 22:14-21. Please note that they were not just thinking about doing something while they waited, but they were actually doing something while they were waiting.

Luke says that while Herod waited for the end of Passover, the church waited in prayer, Acts 12:5. They asked God to be with Peter; whether they were simply requesting that God help sustain his faith or have him released, we're not sure. But we do know that the Greek words used by Luke suggest there was a prayer being offered up around the clock, Luke 22:44.

We should never underestimate the power of God, and we should never try to restrict His capabilities. These people didn't just pray that God would give Peter the courage to face death; they prayed that God would deliver him so that he wouldn't have to face death in the first place, John 15:7.

PETER'S MIRACULOUS ESCAPE FROM PRISON

“The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. “Quick, get up!” he said, and the chains fell off Peter's wrists. Then the angel said to him, “Put on your clothes and sandals.” And Peter did so. “Wrap your cloak around you and follow me,” the angel told him. Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision. They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him”. Acts 12:6-10

Luke says the night before Herod intended to call for Peter, the apostle lay sleeping, Psalm 127:2, chained to two soldiers with two more outside the door, Acts 12:6.

An angel of the Lord, Acts 5:19 / Acts 8:26 / Acts 12:23, woke him up and caused the chains to fall off his hands. Then he told Peter to dress and led him out of the prison, Acts 12:7-8 / Acts 12:1-2.

Peter wasn't sure what was happening because he thought it was a dream, Acts 9:10 / Acts 10:10. But he followed the angel past the first and second guard posts, through the gate, which seemed to open automatically, and out into the street, Acts 12:9-10.

Neil, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Luke clearly regards Peter's escape as a miracle, a divine intervention by a supernatural visitant, Luke 2:9’

This wasn't just a supernatural deliverance; this was God answering the prayers of the saints, who spent the night in prayer. If we believe that God created the heavens and the earth and everything in them, Genesis 1:1, we should have no trouble believing every other miracle we find recorded in the Bible, Revelation 4:11.

“Then Peter came to himself and said, “Now I know without a doubt that the Lord sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's clutches and from everything the Jewish people were anticipating.” When this had dawned on him, he went

to the house of Mary, the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying. Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer the door. When she recognised Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, "Peter is at the door!" "You're out of your mind," they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, "It must be his angel." But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. "Tell James and the brothers about this," he said, and then he left for another place." Acts 12:11-17

Peter, when he found himself free and on the street, finally understood that this wasn't some dream, this was a miracle, Acts 12:11. Why did God allow Herod to kill James but not Peter?

McGee, in his commentary, says the following.

'The answer is that this is the sovereign will of God. He still moves like this in the contemporary church. I have been in the ministry for many years, and I have seen the Lord reach in and take certain wonderful members out of the church by death. And then there are others whom He has left. Why would He do that? If He had asked me, from my viewpoint as the pastor, I would say that He took the wrong one and He left the wrong one! But life and death are in the hands of a sovereign God. This is His universe, not ours. It is God's church, not ours. The hand of a sovereign God moves in the church.'

Luke says that Peter was awestruck and now saw that the Lord had sent His messenger to deliver him out of the murderous hands of Herod, Acts 12:11. And so after thinking for a moment, Peter went to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, to tell the church of his miraculous release, Acts 12:12.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following concerning Mary's house, Acts 12:13.

'The scene that emerges here is one of affluence, if not wealth. Mary's was a house large enough to contain a gathering for a prayer meeting, having a courtyard and a gate attended by a servant. From Mary's example, we may conclude that there were many who had not sold all their possessions during those occasions mentioned earlier in Acts.'

It seems as though a girl named Rhoda recognised the voice of the apostle at the gate and, in her excitement, she did not let him in but went to inform the others in the house that Peter was outside, Acts 12:13-14.

And at first, everybody else thought she was crazy, and then they thought she had heard Peter's angel, Hebrews 1:14, but Peter kept knocking at the door until he got an answer. And when they saw him, they were amazed at what they saw, Acts 12:15-16.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following concerning the angel, Acts 12:15.

'This verse proves that in the apostolic church, the Christians believed that every person has a guardian angel; but it is uncertain what deductions should be made from this fact. Jesus apparently justified such a view by his reference to the angels of little children in Matthew 18:10, as being angels of the highest rank.'

The Bible says that they were 'amazed', and I, too, find this amazing, but not for the same reasons that they were amazed. They were amazed to see Peter, but I'm amazed at their lack of faith.

Luke said that they had been praying constantly to God for Peter, Acts 12:5. Even though they had been praying to God on Peter's behalf for days, it's almost as if they couldn't believe their eyes.

In other words, they were asking God to help Peter, but deep down in their hearts, they didn't believe it was going to happen. And the lesson we can learn from this is, don't pray for something if you don't believe that God will answer it, James 1:5-8.

After everyone saw Peter standing at the door, Peter told them the story of his deliverance by the Lord, and then he told them to inform James, the half-brother of Jesus, Acts 15:13 / Acts 21:18 / Galatians 1:19 / Galatians

2:9 / Galatians 2:12 / James 1:1, and the brethren before he departed from their company, Acts 12:17 / Galatians 2:11-14.

“In the morning, there was no small commotion among the soldiers as to what had become of Peter. After Herod had a thorough search made for him and did not find him, he cross-examined the guards and ordered that they be executed.” Acts 12:18-19

While everyone was amazed and rejoiced that God answered their prayers so powerfully, back at the prison, it was chaos. It should be of no surprise to us that the next morning, the prison was in turmoil because no one knew what had happened to Peter, Acts 12:18.

And when Herod could not find him, he had the guards executed. Under Roman law, it was required that a guard face the punishment which was intended for any prisoner who escaped under their watch, Acts 16:27. That’s why Herod had the guards executed when Peter disappeared, Acts 12:19.

HEROD’S DEATH

“Then Herod went from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there a while. He had been quarrelling with the people of Tyre and Sidon; they now joined together and sought an audience with him. Having secured the support of Blastus, a trusted personal servant of the king, they asked for peace, because they depended on the king’s country for their food supply”. On the appointed day, Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. They shouted, “This is the voice of a god, not of a man.” Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died. But the word of God continued to increase and spread”. Acts 12:19-24

And it wasn’t long after Peter escaped and Herod had his guards killed, that He left Jerusalem and went to Caesarea, his other capital. What happens next is also very interesting, Acts 12:19.

In the Old Testament, we read that the cities of Tyre and Sidon, Acts 12:20/ Ezekiel 27:17 / Ezekiel 28:4, depended on Galilee for their food supply, as they had done in the days of Hiram and Solomon, 1 Kings 5:9-18.

Once these cities realised that they had offended Herod, they set out to make things right. They somehow got close to Herod’s personal aide, Blastus, and through him asked for peace, Acts 12:20.

The Jewish historian Josephus says the following, concerning Acts 12:21.

‘Herod set aside some days to honour Caesar, perhaps on his birthday, which was May 1. And on the second day, he says that Herod went into a theatre where a large group of people were assembled and the early morning sun reflected brightly off his garment, which Josephus says was totally made of silver.’

Why did God have Herod struck dead? Luke says that when Herod was seated on the throne, the people began to praise him as a god, Acts 12:22-23. The mistake that Herod made was that he didn’t stop the proceedings; he gladly accepted all the praise as if he were a god, Isaiah 42:8 / Daniel 4:30.

The Lord caused his angel to strike him because he did not give glory to God. Only God is worthy of our praise; He is the only one we should ever bow down to, Acts 10:25-26 / Revelation 19:10. No man should ever be worshipped because it is only God who is worthy of our worship.

We are blessed to have Jewish historians because they give us a good understanding of what life would have been like during these biblical times. When Josephus was describing this event in his writings, he said that Herod suffered severe stomach pains and a horrible, lingering death that took five days.

Whatever way he died, we can be sure it wasn't nice. Luke tells us that 'he was eaten by worms', Acts 12:23. Time and time again, we've already seen many of the Lord's people thrown into jail to stop the spreading of God's Word. And time and time again we have seen God freeing His people so that His word can be spread, Acts 12:24. Despite the fact that Herod had James executed, despite the fact that they searched for Peter and couldn't find him, even though the cities of Tyre and Sidon joined forces with Herod to keep the peace. Despite all the attacks of men and failure to give God the glory which belongs to Him, God's Word still grew and multiplied, Acts 12:24.

BARNABAS AND SAUL SENT OFF

“When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark. Acts 12:25

In the previous chapter, we left Saul and Barnabas delivering a special offering of money, which was taken up for some needy saints in Jerusalem, Acts 11:30. Luke tells us that straight after Barnabas and Saul had completed their task of delivering the gift of money for the needy saints in Jerusalem, they returned to Antioch, Acts 12:25 / Acts 11:30.

But this time they took John Mark with them, who was Barnabas' cousin, Acts 12:25 / Acts 12:12 / Colossians 4:10. Remember that Mark's mother was Mary; this is important because Luke had just reported that the church met in her house for prayers while Peter was in prison, Acts 12:12.

It is even possible that her house was used as a resting place during Barnabas' and Saul's stay in Jerusalem. She obviously didn't sell her house as Barnabas did earlier, Acts 4:37.

CHAPTER 13

INTRODUCTION

“In the church at Antioch, there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.” Acts 13:1-3

The church in Antioch was blessed with inspired men who delivered God's Word. Luke tells us that the church in Antioch was blessed to have Barnabas, the son of consolation, Simeon, whose nickname was 'black', Luke 23:26. Lucius, who was somehow closely associated with Herod the tetrarch, Luke 23:7-12, and Saul, Acts 13:1 / Acts 9:15-16 / Acts 11:27-30 / Acts 12:25.

As these men were carrying out their various ministries for the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit called for Barnabas and Saul to be set apart for their specially chosen work, Acts 13:2.

According to Luke, the whole church fasted and prayed as they sent them on their way, Acts 13:3. We've already noted several times that the laying of hands was done for one or two reasons.

The apostles would lay their hands on some people to pass on miraculous capabilities, [Acts 8:17-24](#), but sometimes they would also just lay their hands on people to show their approval of the person they were laying their hands on, [1 Timothy 4:14](#). In other words, it wasn't always done to pass on miraculous gifts.

The reason I brought this point up is that the laying on of hands mentioned here was not done to pass on any special gift, but it was done as a sign of the agreement they had with the good work to be done. In other words, Barnabas, John Mark and Saul were being shown that the other disciples approved of what they were about to do.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘It is evident that the laying on of hands imparted no qualification to Barnabas and Saul which they did not already possess. By this means, the church, through its leaders, expressed fellowship with them. They were sent out by the whole church, and to the whole church they reported when they returned to Antioch, [Acts 14:26](#).’

PAUL'S FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY

From [Acts 13-14](#), we read about Paul's first missionary journey, sometime around 46 A.D. or 47 A.D. Beginning in Antioch, he then travelled to Salamis, Paphos, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, and returned to Antioch.

ON CYPRUS

“The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John was with them as their helper.” [Acts 13:4-5](#)

Luke says that they first went to Seleucia, which was the port city of Antioch, [Acts 13:4](#). It was located about sixteen miles downstream. Then they sailed approximately one hundred miles to Salamis, where Barnabas grew up, [Acts 4:36](#).

It was the largest city on the eastern end of the island of Cyprus. And Luke tells Theophilus that Barnabas and Saul preached in the synagogues within the city, and John Mark, [Acts 12:25](#), served as their attendant, [Acts 13:5](#) / [Romans 1:16](#).

Just as a matter of interest, history tells us that around fifty years after Barnabas and Saul were there, there was a Jewish uprising in which two hundred and forty thousand Gentiles were slaughtered. A famous man named Hadrian, who would be a future Roman emperor, put down the rebellion and expelled the Jews from the city.

“They travelled through the whole island until they came to Paphos. There, they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus, who was an attendant of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. The proconsul, an intelligent man, sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God.” [Acts 13:6-7](#)

It appears as though after they crossed over the island to Paphos, which was the capital city and the home of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, [Acts 13:6](#), who Luke tells us was a wise man, [Acts 13:12](#).

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Paphos was infamous for its worship of Venus, the goddess of sexual love.’

Sergius Paulus had a Jewish adviser known as Bar Jesus or Elymas, who Luke tells us was a false prophet and sorcerer, or one who used magic and incantations, [Deuteronomy 18:10-11](#). Elymas' name means sorcerer, [Acts 13:8](#).

When Sergius Paulus heard that Barnabas and Saul were in town, he sent for them because he wanted to hear God's Word, [Acts 13:7](#). Luke tells us that Sergius Paulus was an intelligent man, [Acts 13:12](#), and we're going to see why in a moment.

The most intelligent people are those who recognise there is a God and want to search for and obey the truth of our Creator. Sergius Paulus was an intelligent man because he wanted to hear God's Word.

“But Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith. Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, “You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind, and for a time you will be unable to see the light of the sun.” Immediately, mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand. “When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord”. Acts 13:8-12

Luke tells us that Elymas, whose name means sorcerer, did everything he could to deter the proconsul from hearing these preachers, [Acts 13:8](#). Why he didn't want the proconsul to know about God, no one is sure, possibly because he feared he might lose his influence.

Luke also tells us that Saul, who was also known by his Greek name, Paul, was filled with the Holy Spirit when he challenged the sorcerer, [Acts 13:9](#). Note how many times Luke records God's people being full of the Spirit: [Acts 2:4](#) / [Acts 4:8](#) / [Acts 4:31](#) / [Acts 6:3](#) / [Acts 6:5](#) / [Acts 7:55](#) / [Acts 9:17](#).

Lenski, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Saul’s father gave the child a Roman and a Latin name because he was a Roman citizen with all the rights in the Roman Empire this implied. The child had both names from infancy. When his father called him, he shouted, ‘Saul, Saul!’ but when the Greek boys with whom he played called him, they shouted, ‘Paul, Paul!’

Magicians are nothing new in the Scriptures, [Exodus 7:10-12](#) / [Exodus 7:20-22](#) / [Exodus 8:6-7](#) / [Exodus 8:16-18](#), but no one can beat God in a power display war, [Acts 13:10](#).

And although sorcerers have a lot of influence on people by using magic to convince them that they are someone powerful when they are not, they cannot beat the power of God, [Acts 13:10](#).

Paul says that Elymas was a child of the devil, a deceiver who opposed righteous living, [Acts 8:9-23](#) / [Acts 16:16-18](#) / [Acts 19:13-17](#), and so Paul, by the power of God, struck him blind for a season, [Acts 13:11](#) / [Acts 9:9](#).

The word ‘mist’ is used to describe a dimming of the vision brought on by cataracts or disease. This is the second of four incidents involving victory over demonic powers in Acts, [Acts 8:9-23](#) / [Acts 16:16-18](#) / [Acts 19:13-17](#).

Notice something important in this text, too. This is another text which shows us the purpose of miracles during Biblical times. The teachings of Jesus, which had been presented and the power of the miracle, convinced Sergius Paulus to follow Christ in full obedience, [Acts 13:12](#) / [Acts 16:34](#).

As one man's eyes were blinded, another man's eyes opened to the truth of the Gospel. In other words, the miracles performed in the Bible were to prove that the words which were being preached were true and from God, [Mark 16:20](#) / [Acts 14:3](#) / [Hebrews 2:4](#).

IN PISIDIAN ANTIOCH

“From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem. From Perga, they went on to Pisidian Antioch. On the Sabbath, they entered the synagogue and sat down. After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the synagogue rulers sent word to them, saying, “Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people, please speak.” Acts 13:13-15

After blinding the sorcerer and convincing Sergius Paulus that Jesus was who He claimed to be, they would have landed at the port of Attalia and then gone on the short distance to Perga, which is in modern-day Turkey.

We don't know the reasons why, but for some reason, John Mark decided to leave Paul and his companions at Perga as the rest of the group went on to Antioch in Pisidia, which at that time, was considered to be part of Galatia, [Acts 13:13](#) / [Acts 12:25](#) / [Acts 15:36-41](#) / [Galatians 4:13](#).

Perga was a coastal city where the ship from Paphos came to the mainland. Antioch in Pisidia was about one hundred and thirty-five miles inland, to the north, in the area of Galatia.

William M. Ramsay says the following.

‘The churches of Antioch, Lystra, Derbe, Iconium, though south of Galatia proper, were nevertheless in the province of Galatia, and could be spoken of as the Galatian churches, this grouping (of these places in Galatia) was abandoned after some three hundred years; and the name ‘Galatia’ reverted to the northern part of the province. The wider meaning of the name (Galatia) was apparently forgotten until it was recovered largely through the research of Sir.’

And look where they went to? The missionary group went to Pisidian Antioch and into the synagogue on the Sabbath and listened to the reading of the Scriptures, [Acts 13:14](#).

It was then that the rulers of the synagogue asked if they had some instruction to give them. And so Paul, as we all should do, seized the moment and addressed the men of Israel and God-fearers assembled there, [Acts 13:15](#).

What an opportunity this is to share the Gospel with some people, they were ready to share that good news, and they seized the moment, [Colossians 4:2-5](#) / [Ephesians 6:19-20](#) / [1 Peter 3:15](#).

We all need to seize the moment, and that's exactly what Paul did next, because all he ever wanted to let people know about was Jesus, and he wasn't about to let this opportunity slip from him.

“Standing up, Paul motioned with his hand and said: “Men of Israel and you Gentiles who worship God, listen to me! The God of the people of Israel chose our fathers; he made the people prosper during their stay in Egypt, with mighty power, he led them out of that country, he endured their conduct for about forty years in the desert, he overthrew seven nations in Canaan and gave their land to his people as their inheritance. All this took about 450 years. “After this, God gave them judges until the time of Samuel the prophet. Then the people asked for a king, and he gave them Saul, son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin, who ruled forty years. After removing Saul, he made David their king. He testified concerning him: ‘I have found David, son of Jesse, a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.’ “From this man’s descendants God has brought to Israel the Saviour Jesus, as he promised.” Acts 13:16-

23

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Paul’s address falls into three logical divisions: 1. The historical background of the Messiah, [Acts 13:17-23](#), culminating in the coming of Jesus, the Son of David. 2. The proof that Jesus was indeed the promised deliverer, [Acts 13:24-37](#). 3. An appeal to the people with a warning against rejecting Christ, [Acts 13:38-41](#).’

Paul did basically what Peter did on Pentecost, [Acts 2:14-40](#), and what Stephen did in [Acts 7:2-53](#); he shared with them a Jewish history lesson. He addresses the Jews and the Gentiles, [Acts 13:16](#), and he tells them God chose them, [Genesis 12:3](#), and made them prosper in Egypt, [Acts 13:17](#).

He talked about how God delivered the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage, [Acts 13:17](#) / [Exodus 12:31-42](#) / [Exodus 13:17-22](#). He reminded them of the forty years of wilderness wandering, [Joshua 5:6-7](#), and how God defeated seven nations so Israel could have a home in Canaan, [Acts 13:18-19](#) / [Deuteronomy 7:1](#).

He also reminded those assembled that God had ruled in Israel for four hundred and fifty years using judges. And when the people asked for a king, God gave them Saul, then David, after Saul was removed, [Acts 13:20-22](#) / [1 Samuel 8:7](#).

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following concerning Saul’s reign.

‘The Old Testament does not give the length of Saul’s reign, but Josephus also sets it at forty years, covering eighteen years until the death of Samuel and continuing 22 years afterward.’

He says it was from the seed of David, who was man after God’s own heart, that God raised up a Saviour for His people named Jesus, [Acts 13:22-23](#).

WHY DID GOD SAY THAT DAVID WAS A ‘MAN AFTER HIS OWN HEART’?

To try and understand why David was a man ‘after God’s own heart’, we need to contrast the character of Saul, who was Israel’s first king, with the character of David, their second king.

It wasn’t long after Saul had become king that we began to see what was really going on in his heart. If you remember, Saul and his army were about to go into battle against the Philistines, and he wanted God’s blessings to be with him and his army.

I guess there was nothing wrong with wanting God’s blessings before going into a war. However, the problem came because he became impatient; he was told to wait seven days for the prophet Samuel to arrive, but his patience ran out. So, he decided to go ahead and present a burnt offering to the Lord himself, [1 Samuel 13:1-9](#).

Like most of us who are impatient, he came out with an excuse when Samuel finally arrived and asked him what he had done. Saul’s excuse was that he ‘felt compelled’ to offer the burnt offering, when in fact he deliberately chose to offer the sacrifice knowing that this could only be done by the priests, [1 Samuel 13:12](#).

Saul was then told by Samuel that he would no longer be king and his kingdom would be taken from him because of his actions. Saul was a character who only thought about himself; he totally ignored God’s commandments and God’s direction. He totally disobeyed God, and as a result, this demonstrated that he certainly wasn’t a man after God’s own heart, [1 Samuel 13:13-14](#).

Notice that Samuel mentions that God was looking for a man after His own heart, a man who would become the new leader of Israel. A little later, God sent Samuel to Jesse the Bethlehemite to find the next king from among his sons, [1 Samuel 16:1](#).

When Samuel arrived, he was impressed with several of the sons of Jesse, but God didn’t want them, and so He helped Samuel to choose the right person. We read in [1 Samuel 16:7](#) that God doesn’t judge people on their external appearance, but He looks at their hearts.

In other words, God doesn’t fall for the facade that many people have today, with their false words and actions. God knew Saul’s heart and rejected him, and then He looked at David’s heart and chose him, [1 Samuel 16:10-13](#).

WHAT MADE DAVID DIFFERENT FROM SAUL?

1. God chose David because He knew David would obey Him and do what God commands.

Saul did his own thing, what he wanted to do, [Jeremiah 7:21-23](#), but David was obedient to God and His commands, [Acts 13:21-22](#). Notice that God says that David, ‘will do everything I want him to do’, this implies

obedience. Saul did his own thing and didn't want to obey God because he wanted to please himself, but David felt compelled to obey God in order to please God.

In other words, David cared about what God cared about, he desired what God desired, and his heart sought after the things that God sought after. This is exactly what we see in Christ when He lived His life, Luke 2:49 / Luke 22:42.

No one can have the heart of God if they don't obey God and carry out His commands.

2. God chose David because He knew David would love Him more than anything else.

This was something else which Saul lacked. We can't tell God that we love Him if we're not willing to obey Him, John 14:15. These simple words of Jesus are very clear, but many people struggle to keep His commands. Many people claim that they love God but totally ignore His commandments. Maybe the reason they struggle to keep His commands is simply that they struggle to truly love God in the first place.

David loved Saul, but he loved God more, hence why he obeyed God rather than obeying Saul. We only have to turn to the Psalms to find that many of them were written by David, not Saul. Many of the Psalms which David wrote were all about God; there are many which are love songs, which reveal his heart's desire and love for God.

Many of the Psalms were written by David, and they reveal that David had a real passion for God; he really wanted to know God, Psalms 42:1-2. It's clear that David only wanted to worship God, whilst Saul just wanted to worship himself, 1 Samuel 18:8.

3. God chose David because He knew David would lead people and not follow people as Saul did.

We can always tell what kind of relationship a person has with God by the way their interactions with others around them. We see this difference in the character of Saul and David.

Saul wanted nothing more than to be praised by those around him, and as a result, he ended up following people, rather than leading them; he ended up obeying people rather than obeying God, 1 Samuel 15:24.

While Saul desired the praise of men, David was the absolute opposite; he successfully led people because he was following God's lead and was obedient to Him. As a result of following and obeying God, he successfully encouraged people to do what was good and right in the eyes of God.

We see this on one occasion when he had an opportunity to kill Saul because His men were encouraging him to do so, but David encouraged them not to do so because he wanted to please God instead, 1 Samuel 24:4-7.

It's in these verses that we see that David 'persuaded his men' while Saul was persuaded by men, we see that Saul wanted to carry out his own vengeance, but David left the matter in God's hands, 1 Samuel 24:12.

David never tries to win the hearts of people; he only wants to win the heart of God and as a result, he became a great leader because he not only loved God more than anything else, but he also fully obeyed Him.

4. God chose David because He knew David would come to hate sin as He hates sin.

People often wonder how David could be a 'man after God's own heart' when he sinned many times against the Lord. The two most memorable sins were when he committed adultery with Bathsheba and had her husband, Uriah, murdered on the battlefield, 2 Samuel 11:1-16.

David didn't live a sinless life, but as His love for God grew stronger, he came to hate sin as God hates sin. Psalms 32 tells us of David's repentance and sorrow over his sin.

We see this especially in Psalms 51, after the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba, 2 Samuel 12:1-23, David is clearly repenting of his sin with Bathsheba.

While being a man after God's own heart is about obeying God, having the same desires as God's heart, and seeking to please God rather than people, a man after God's own heart also repents deeply when he knows he's failed.

WHY WAS DAVID A MAN ‘AFTER GOD’S OWN HEART’?

David deeply loved God more than anything else, and he obeyed His commands, [Jeremiah 9:23-24](#). He learned to hate sin as God hates sin, [Romans 6:23](#); he grieved over his sin as God grieves when we sin, [Genesis 6:6](#). He wanted to lead people in the ways of God, rather than allowing people to lead him into sin.

CONCLUSION

God knows that none of us can live a perfect life like His Son Jesus did, [1 Peter 2:22-24](#), but He still desires that His people will have hearts ‘after His own heart’. He still desires that we love God more than anything else, [1 John 5:3](#). He still desires that we obey His commands, [John 14:21](#). He still desires that we hate sin and refrain from sinning, [Romans 6:1-14](#). He still desires that we lead people to Him and encourage them to obey His commands, [Matthew 28:18-20](#). He still desires that we live a holy life because He is a holy God, [1 Peter 1:15-16](#). Do you desire what God desires? [Ecclesiastes 12:13](#).

“Before the coming of Jesus, John preached repentance and baptism to all the people of Israel. As John was completing his work, he said: ‘Who do you think I am? I am not that one. No, but he is coming after me, whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.’” [Acts 13:24-25](#)

Before God sent the Saviour of the world, He sent John the baptiser to prepare the Way for the Saviour by preaching a baptism of repentance, [Acts 13:24](#). Paul finally reminds them that John had told the people he was not the Messiah, He wasn’t even worthy to untie his sandals, but the One coming after him was, [Acts 13:25](#) / [John 1:27](#). Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

The testimony of John was extensive and included the following affirmations concerning our Lord: That Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the world’s sin, [John 1:29](#). That Jesus would baptise with the Holy Spirit, [John 1:33](#). That, having the bride, he was the Bridegroom, [John 3:29](#). That he came from above and is above all, [John 3:31](#). That he was sent by God and spoke God’s words, [John 3:33](#). That God had given to the Son all things, [John 3:35](#). That he that believeth on the Son shall have eternal life, [John 3:36](#). That he that obeyeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him, [John 3:36](#).

“Brothers, children of Abraham, and you God-fearing Gentiles, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent. The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognise Jesus, yet in condemning him, they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath. Though they found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have him executed. When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb”. [Acts 13:26-29](#)

Luke tells us that Paul proclaimed that the message of the salvation brought by the Messiah was being delivered to them, His fellow children of Abraham and you God-fearing Gentiles, [Acts 13:26](#).

Luke says that the Jewish leaders and other people fulfilled the prophecies about Christ’s death because they did not recognise the Saviour, [Acts 13:27](#). Paul tells them that they didn’t understand what the prophets had foretold. And so, Paul tells them that they had crucified an innocent man named Jesus, [Acts 13:27-29](#).

Note that the KJV uses the word ‘tree’ instead of cross, [Acts 13:29](#). It appears Paul had [Deuteronomy 21:22-23](#) in mind, where it says cursed is a person who hangs on a tree, [Galatians 3:13](#).

“But God raised him from the dead, and for many days he was seen by those who had travelled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to our people. “We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm: “‘You are my Son; today I have become your Father.’ The fact that God raised him from the dead, never to decay, is stated in these words: “‘I will give you the holy and sure blessings promised to David.’ So it is stated elsewhere: “‘You will not let your Holy One see decay.’ “For when David had served God’s purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his fathers, and his body decayed. But the one whom God raised from the dead did not see decay.” Acts 13:30-38

Paul reminds them that they had also fulfilled all the other prophecies concerning His rejection, death and burial. Those who saw Jesus are now witnesses, [Acts 13:30-33](#) / [Matthew 28:9-10](#) / [Luke 24:13-34](#) / [John 20:11-17](#) / [John 20:26-30](#) / [Acts 1:3](#) / [1 Corinthians 15:6](#).

Paul declares that God declared Jesus to be His Son when He raised Him from the dead, [Psalm 2:7](#) / [John 5:21-22](#) / [Romans 8:11-13](#), and made Him the Davidic ruler, [Acts 13:32](#) / [Psalms 2:7](#) / [Hebrews 1:5](#) / [Hebrews 5:5](#).

Similarly, God had declared David His son when He made David ruler over Israel, [2 Samuel 7:10-14](#).

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following. concerning the second Psalm, [Acts 13:33](#).

‘Some ancient manuscripts read ‘in the first Psalm,’ due to some third-century Psalters combining [Psalms 1, 2](#), making both together the first Psalm.’

I love those two little words, ‘but God,’ and while Paul is talking about the rejection, death and burial of Jesus Christ, he continues using those same two little words.

He says that the Jews rejected Christ, ‘but God.’ He says they murdered the innocent Christ, ‘but God’. He says they buried Him in a tomb, ‘but God’. In other words, all the events which happened concerning the Christ were prophesied many years before they actually happened.

Paul says, ‘but God’ did not abandon Jesus, He raised Him up from the grave, [Acts 13:33](#). Paul asks, do you want proof? He says many witnesses could tell you how they personally had seen the resurrected Lord.

And so Paul quotes two Old Testament passages to prove his case, [Acts 13:34-35](#) / [Isaiah 55:3](#) / [Psalm 16:10](#). Paul says this is what the Old Testament prophets were saying. The Old Testament prophets were saying that the Holy One promised by God was coming, and His Name is Jesus.

If the Jews wanted to visit a grave of a loved one, they could simply go down to the local graveyard and visit the tomb. And Paul says, if they wanted to go down to the local graveyard, they can still see the tomb of King David, and if they were to dig it up, they would still see the remains of David’s body today, [Acts 13:36](#) / [Acts 2:29](#).

But Paul goes on to say that the very fact that Jesus’ body was raised and did not stay in the tomb long enough to see decay, set Him apart above David as God’s promised Messiah, [Acts 13:37](#) / [2 Samuel 7:10-14](#).

In other words, that’s why Jesus was so much different from King David. The resurrection of Christ is so important to Christians, [1 Corinthians 15:14](#) / [1 Corinthians 15:17](#) / [Romans 1:4](#).

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Since Jesus rose from the dead, God can give people the blessings that He promised would come through David, [Acts 13:34](#) / [Isaiah 55:3](#) / [Acts 2:25-32](#). The blessings mentioned in this Old Testament passage are those of the New Covenant. The fact that Jesus rose from the dead and did not undergo decay proves that He is the Holy One of whom David spoke in [Psalms 16:10](#) / [Acts 13:35](#).’

“Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him, everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses. Take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you: “‘Look, you scoffers, wonder and perish, for I am going to do something in your days that you would never believe, even if someone told you.” Acts 13:38-41

Paul says the central message of the gospel is the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, [1 Corinthians 15:1-4](#). In other words, if Jesus had never been raised from the grave, the Gospel never could have been preached. Because the Gospel is not about a 'lifeless lord', it's about a 'risen Redeemer'.

Jesus' resurrection gives meaning to a Christian's faith, and it's because of His resurrection that we meet every Sunday to partake of the Lord's Supper, and we remember the Lord's death 'until He comes,' [1 Corinthians 11:26](#). If Jesus were not risen, however, we would have no hope of His coming again, and Paul's statement in [1 Corinthians 11:26](#), regarding the Lord's Supper, would be meaningless.

Every time Christians pray 'in Jesus' name', [John 14:13-14](#) / [Colossians 3:17](#), we are relying on our risen Saviour Jesus to mediate on our behalf, [1 Timothy 2:5](#). But, if Jesus did not rise, our prayers would not be heard, and our petitions to have our sins forgiven could not be granted.

The only reason that preaching and baptising, as we read about in [Matthew 28:19-20](#) and [Mark 16:15-16](#), are of any importance at all is that Jesus is not dead, but alive, [Ephesians 2:8-9](#).

When a person is baptised 'for the remission of sins', [Acts 13:38](#), as we saw happening in [Acts 2:38](#), and in [Acts 10:43](#), they are raised from a world of sin, as [Romans 6:4](#) tells us. Jesus not only forgives us, but He also justifies us, [Acts 13:39](#) / [Deuteronomy 25:1](#) / [Romans 3:22](#).

What Paul is really saying to them at this point was, don't be the ones to fulfil Habakkuk's prophecy, [Acts 13:40-41](#). He reminds them of another Old Testament passage, this time it was the words of the prophet Habakkuk, [Acts 13:41](#) / [Habakkuk 1:5](#).

Paul says Habakkuk foretold that some people would reject the one God who had clearly been approved by great signs, [Acts 13:41](#) / [Habakkuk 1:5](#). And he says I'll tell you why, it is because of Jesus and only through Jesus, [John 14:6](#) / [Acts 4:12](#), was the forgiveness of sins made available to all who would obey Jesus, [Mark 16:15-16](#) / [John 14:15](#).

"As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath. When the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God. On the next Sabbath, almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying". [Acts 13:42-45](#)

Luke tells us that as Paul and Barnabas went out of the synagogue, some were stirred to ask Paul and Barnabas to return the following week to speak again, [Acts 13:42](#).

Notice many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, not only to talk with them, but also to urge them to continue in the grace of God, [Acts 13:43](#).

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

'Paul's message created great interest in the hearts of many people who listened to him. Paul possessed great powers of persuasion, [Acts 18:4](#) / [Acts 19:8](#) / [Acts 19:26](#) / [Acts 26:28](#) / [Acts 28:23](#) / [2 Corinthians 5:11](#) / [Galatians 1:10](#), but the Holy Spirit was at work too.'

It appears from our text that the next Sabbath day, a whole bunch of other people came to hear them preach. In fact, Luke tells us that nearly the whole city gathered to hear God's Word proclaimed, [Acts 13:44](#).

Paul did what he did earlier; he seized the moment. Notice, however, that not everyone was pleased with what Paul had to say. Some in the audience who were Jews were jealous, [Acts 5:17](#), upon seeing the large gathering, and contradicted the message Paul delivered and spoke against God, [Acts 13:45](#).

Poole, in his commentary, says the following.

'The Jews could not endure that the Gentiles should be equal to them, being as much concerned against the Gentiles being exalted, as against their own being depressed.'

“Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: “We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. For this is what the Lord has commanded us: “‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’” When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honoured the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed. The word of the Lord spread through the whole region”. Acts 13:46-49

The apostles immediately let them know that they were required to preach to the Jews first, but if the Jews were determined to reject the Gospel, then they would preach to the Gentiles, [Acts 13:46](#) / [Hosea 1:10](#) / [Hosea 2:23](#) / [Isaiah 65:2](#).

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The gospel was good news to the Jews in a larger sense than it was to the Gentiles. Paul almost always preached the gospel to the Jews first in the towns he visited, [Acts 13:50-51](#) / [Acts 14:2-6](#) / [Acts 17:5](#) / [Acts 17:13-15](#) / [Acts 18:6](#) / [Acts 19:8-9](#) / [Acts 28:23-28](#) / [Romans 1:16](#). The Jews’ rejection of the gospel led him to offer it next to the Gentiles.’

Paul then quotes [Isaiah 49:6](#) / [Acts 13:47](#) / [Luke 2:28-32](#), and reminds everyone what Isaiah had prophesied centuries before. As you can imagine, that statement alone led to great rejoicing among the Gentiles, [Acts 13:48](#).

And because of such bold preaching, the Gentiles who willingly obeyed the Word of God were added to the kingdom by the Lord, [Romans 1:16](#), and so the truth was spread throughout the country, [Acts 13:49](#).

Paul and Barnabas, preached boldly because they wanted to please God, not men, [Acts 5:29](#). The apostles were not in the business of pleasing people, they wanted to please God. As we have seen time and time again throughout the Book of Acts, some people will humbly accept the message, whilst others will find it offensive.

“But the Jews incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas and expelled them from their region. So they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.” Acts 13:50-52

Luke tells us that while all this rejoicing was going on, the Jews stirred up the prominent women of the city and those in authority, [Acts 13:50](#). And it was because of those people who were highly offended by the message that they had Paul and Barnabas persecuted and finally cast out of the city, [Acts 13:50](#).

Notice how both Paul and Barnabas reacted to their persecution; they put into practice the words of their Master Jesus. Paul and Barnabas shook the dust off their feet and went on to Iconium, [Acts 13:51](#) / [Matthew 7:6](#) / [Mark 6:10-11](#) / [Luke 9:5](#) / [Luke 10:11](#).

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following concerning the shaking off of the dust from their feet.

‘The symbolism of this was a warning that the rejection of the message they had preached would have eternal consequences for those who refused to hear them.’

Despite all the opposition, those who had believed God’s Word rejoiced and were filled with the Holy Spirit, [Acts 13:52](#) / [Acts 13:48](#) / [Acts 13:50](#) / [Acts 16:24-25](#) / [Ephesians 5:18](#).

CHAPTER 14

INTRODUCTION

“At Iconium, Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There, they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed. But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders.” Acts 14:1-3

IN ICONIUM

In the previous chapter, we left Paul and Barnabas shaking the dust from their feet after the Jewish leaders stirred up trouble for them in Pisidian Antioch, [Acts 13:50-51](#).

While all this was going on, Luke informs us that the Gospel was being spread all over the country. And so, Paul and Barnabas leave the saints at Antioch very happy and full of the Spirit and moved on to Iconium, [Acts 13:52](#).

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘This old Phrygian city, then a part of Roman Galatia, had a history reaching back into prehistoric times; it was located on the site of the modern city of Konia, a portion of the ancient name being still retained. Greek mythology relates that King Nannakos ruled there, that an oracle warned him of a worldwide flood, which he vainly sought to avert through tears and entreaties to the gods. The flood came; and when the waters receded, Prometheus and Athena made images of mud into which the winds breathed life; so was the earth repopulated.’

Every time an apostle of Christ went into a new city, the first place they would go to was the local synagogue if that city had one. And when Paul and Barnabas arrived in Iconium, they immediately went to the synagogue and seized upon an opportunity to preach, [Acts 14:1](#) / [Acts 13:46](#).

Interestingly, Luke doesn’t go into details with the exact words that Paul and Barnabas spoke, but he does let us know that the message was powerful enough to move a great multitude, [Acts 14:1](#). Their words were so powerful that they moved a multitude of people, which comprised both Jews and Gentiles, to the point of obedient belief, [Acts 14:1](#).

However, as always, some people love nothing better than to cause trouble. Luke tells us there was a bunch of Jews who refused to obey the Gospel, and they did all they could to poison the thinking of the Gentile citizens, as well as the authorities, [Acts 14:2](#).

Because of the trouble these Jews caused, [Acts 14:2](#), Paul and Barnabas stayed in the city for some time, [Acts 14:3](#).

Again, what we see happening here is the purpose of the miracles being fulfilled, [Acts 14:3](#).

Miracles were designed to confirm the Word being preached, [Acts 2:43](#) / [Acts 4:30](#) / [Acts 5:12](#) / [Acts 6:8](#) / [Acts 8:6](#) / [Acts 8:13](#) / [Acts 15:12](#) / [Galatians 3:5](#) / [2 Corinthians 12:12](#) / [Hebrews 2:3-4](#).

The miracles stood as a testimony of the preacher’s words; the miracles proved that the preacher’s words were true and from God Himself, [Acts 14:3](#) / [2 Corinthians 12:12](#) / [Romans 15:18](#).

A city is a big place, and just because one side of a city wasn’t working well, it doesn’t necessarily mean that other areas within that same city are going to be the same.

That’s exactly what Paul and Barnabas did; they moved on to another area within the city of Iconium, and as they preached, the Lord caused great miracles to be worked by them, thereby confirming the words as being from Him, [Acts 14:3](#).

“The people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews, others with the apostles. There was a plot afoot among the Gentiles and Jews, together with their leaders, to mistreat them and stone them. But they found out about it and fled to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding country, where they continued to preach the good news.” Acts 14:4-7

Acts 14:4 is the first time Paul and Barnabas are called apostles in the Book of Acts. The only other time the title is used for them is in Acts 14:14. Luke tells us that the city continued to be divided into two groups: those who obediently believed the preached Word and those who demonstrated their lack of belief by refusing to obey, Acts 14:4 / Luke 12:51-53. And it's those people who conspired to work physical harm on the preachers, even to the point of stoning, Acts 14:5.

Foakes-Jackson, in their commentary, says the following.

‘It would have required a regular Hebrew court to sanction it (a legal stoning), and it would never have been tolerated in a Roman colony.’

Bruce, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Sir William Ramsay has recorded how it was this geographical note in Acts 14:6, that led to his first ‘change of judgment’ with regard to the historical value of Acts, convincing him that the statement was entirely correct.’ Remember, creating trouble is a troublemaker’s job description, that’s what they do for a living, that’s what they enjoy doing the most, Proverbs 24:1-2. Just like they did at Antioch, they probably shook the dust from their feet with these trouble makers, Acts 13:51, and went to pastures new, Acts 14:6-7 / Matthew 10:23.

IN LYSTRA AND DERBE

“In Lystra, there sat a man crippled in his feet, who was lame from birth and had never walked. He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed and called out, “Stand up on your feet!” At that, the man jumped up and began to walk.” Acts 14:8-10

The apostle Paul was well aware of what it means to be persecuted, hence why he encourages us to expect it, 2 Timothy 3:12. Paul and Barnabas didn’t hang around while these people were out to kill them; they moved on. They moved on and preached the Gospel in Lystra and Derbe.

Boice, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The apostles did not go into these cities to do miracles, and then to preach. Rather, it was the other way around: They went to preach; then sometimes there were healings.’

Luke tells us that Paul and Barnabas arrived at Lystra, which was around eighteen miles to the east of Iconium, Acts 14:8.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Lystra was the first stop, being only about eighteen or twenty miles eastward from Iconium; but the distance was not measured merely in miles, for it lay in a different political division of Galatia; and the people spoke a different language. This was a primitive place, singled out by Augustus as a colony, probably for the defence of the south-eastern frontier of the Galatian province. Throughout the countryside, the old Anatolian village system prevailed, and the native language of Lycaonia was spoken. Lystra was the market-town, with streets crowded by the local peasantry on market and festal days.’

Remember, the apostles would usually check out the local synagogue when they arrived in a new city, but Lystra doesn’t have one. But what they did find was something which was very familiar even to us today, a cripple.

This man had been crippled since birth and had never walked, and it seems as though he paid close attention to the words of the apostle, Acts 14:8 / Acts 3:1-10 / Acts 9:33-35.

Paul recognised that the man fully believed he could be healed, Matthew 9:28-29 / Mark 6:5-6 / Mark 9:22-24, through the Name of Jesus, which Paul preached, Acts 14:9. And when Paul commanded him to stand on his feet, he leapt up and walked, Acts 14:10.

Bruce, in his commentary, says the following.

‘That this lame man had faith was made plain by his ready obedience to Paul’s command to stand up.’

Notice also that this man had no money to pay for ‘a healing.’ Unlike the wealthy so-called ‘faith-healers’ of today, when Jesus or any of the apostles performed miracles and healed people, they did not do it for financial gain; this man had no money, 1 Timothy 6:3-5.

Notice also that Paul and Barnabas had no alternative motives either for healing the man. In Biblical times, miracles always had a worthy motive, and signs were ‘not done’ for the purpose of personal elaboration.

Though Jesus’ miracles established the validity of His claim of being the Son of God, that designation was ‘not assumed’ out of personal interest. The reason that Jesus and the apostles performed miracles was purely motivated by a love for man’s salvation. As we are about to see, if Paul and Barnabas were after personal gain or praise, the perfect opportunity for them was about to arise.

“When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, “The gods have come down to us in human form!” Barnabas, they called Zeus, and Paul, they called Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates because he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them. But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting.” Acts 14:11-14

The people of Lystra were very superstitious, and when they saw the lame man walk, they concluded the gods had come to be with them, Acts 14:11. And in their infinite wisdom, they also decided Barnabas was Zeus, the ‘patron god’ of that area, and Paul was Hermes, who was called the ‘god of Eloquence’, Acts 14:12.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘If Satan cannot derail Christian witness with persecution, he will try praise. Too much persecution has destroyed many preachers, and too much praise has ruined many others. One of the problems with miracles is that they often draw more attention to the miracle worker than to God.’

We might wonder why Paul and Barnabas didn’t stop this straight away. The simple answer is that they didn’t know what was happening straight away since the people spoke in the language of the Lycaonians, Acts 14:11.

Boles, in his commentary, says the following.

‘This shows that the gift of tongues did not give the apostles power to speak or to understand all dialects.’

Bruce, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The crowd’s use of Lycaonian explains why Paul and Barnabas did not grasp what was afoot until the preparations to pay them divine homage were well advanced.’

It wasn’t until they saw the priest who served in the temple of Zeus on the road leading into the city, bringing oxen with garlands on their heads to be sacrificed to the two ‘visiting gods’, Acts 14:13. It was then they realised what was happening, and so they tore their clothes, Mark 14:63, and ran in among the crowd shouting, Acts 14:14.

“Men, why are you doing this? We, too, are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them. In the past, he let all nations go their own way. Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by

giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy.” Even with these words, they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them”. Acts 14:15-18

This text shows us they weren’t looking for self-praise, but they wanted to share the love of God with them to bring them to salvation, [Acts 13:16-41](#) / [Acts 17:22-31](#).

They asked the people why they would do such a thing since they were mere mortals just like them, [Acts 14:15](#). They pleaded with the people to turn from their empty worship of idols to serve the true living God, [Acts 14:15](#) / [1 Thessalonians 1:9](#).

The true God who was the creator of the universe. The true God, who had for years allowed man to ignorantly pursue his own path, [Acts 14:16](#), even though God always provided mankind with good things, like the rain and the harvest, [Acts 14:17](#) / [Psalm 19:1-4](#) / [Matthew 5:45](#) / [Romans 1:18-25](#).

And Luke tells us that the speech was unsuccessful in stopping the intended sacrifice, [Luke 14:18](#). However, this doesn’t mean that no one listened.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Timothy was apparently a native of Lystra, [Acts 16:1-2](#) / [Acts 20:4](#) / [2 Timothy 1:5](#). He apparently had a Jewish mother and grandmother, [Acts 16:3](#) / [2 Timothy 1:5](#). This may indicate that there were some Jews who lived there.’

“Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead. But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day, he and Barnabas left for Derbe.” Acts 14:19-20

These people who have caused Paul and Barnabas a lot of trouble, [Acts 14:5-6](#), are continually following them around, and they won’t stop until Paul is dead. Luke tells us that these hostile Jews from Antioch and Iconium soon came to Lystra and persuaded the people to stone Paul. And so they dragged his seemingly lifeless body outside the city, thinking he was dead, [Acts 14:19](#).

Some scholars believe that Paul was actually killed and raised to life again, because stoning was usually a reliable form of execution, [Acts 7:58-8:1](#) / [Galatians 6:17](#) / [2 Corinthians 11:25](#). Other scholars believe that this is when Paul was caught up into the third heaven, [2 Corinthians 12:2-4](#). There is no way to prove or disprove any of these ideas. Luke says that the disciples gathered around him, [Acts 14:20](#), perhaps in mourning and the next thing you know, Paul’s back up on his feet and what does he do?

Paul decided he had unfinished business to attend to and stayed another night, [Acts 14:20](#). He walked straight back into the city, spent the night there and left the next morning with Barnabas to go to Derbe, [Acts 14:20](#) / [Acts 16:1](#). Later, see that many more people became believers and disciples in Derbe, particularly a man named Gaius, [Acts 20:4](#).

The New Bible Dictionary says the following.

‘The site of Derbe was identified in 1956 by M. Ballance at Kerti Huyuk, 13 miles North Northeast of Kavaman (Laranda), some 60 miles from Lystra (whence [Acts 14:20b](#) must evidently be translated, ‘and on the morrow he set out with Barnabas for Derbe.’

THE RETURN TO ANTIOCH IN SYRIA

“The next day, he and Barnabas left for Derbe. They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,” they said. Paul and

Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust". Acts 14:21-23

Paul and Barnabas travelled some sixty miles to the east to the city of Derbe, which was on the easternmost edge of Roman Galatia, Acts 14:20. It appears here at least, their message was well received because they won a large number of disciples over to the Lord, Acts 14:21.

And then what did they do? They returned to the very cities where they were receiving a lot of persecution. But they went back to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch for a reason, Acts 14:21.

And that reason was to urge the brethren to remain faithful despite the persecution, Galatians 4:13 / Galatians 6:17 / 2 Timothy 3:11-12, if they want to enter God's kingdom, Acts 14:22 / Matthew 18:7 / 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12.

And to choose men in each city to serve as elders in the church, Acts 14:23 / Acts 20:17 / Ephesians 4:11 / 1 Timothy 3:1-7 / Titus 1:6-9. It's interesting to note that whichever men were chosen to serve as elders, they were obviously still young converts.

1 Timothy 3:6 tells us that a man can't be an elder if he is a young convert. Although we are not told how this was possible, it's certainly possible that these young men possibly had the miraculous gift of faith, 1 Corinthians 12:9.

Obviously, their appointment was intended to help strengthen the church since Paul and Barnabas also prayed and fasted with them while urging them to rely on the Lord in whom they had placed their trust, Acts 14:23 / Acts 13:3.

Notice the plurality of elders, which appears to be a pattern for the church, Acts 14:23 / Acts 20:17 / Philippians 1:1 / Titus 1:5. Notice also that the text doesn't tell us exactly how the appointment of these elders took place.

In New Testament times, a congregation without elders was the exception, not the rule. The Galatian churches had elders Acts 14:23. The churches in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia had elders 1 Peter 5:1.

The church in Philippi had elders Philippians 1:1. The church in Judea had elders Acts 11:30. The church in Jerusalem had elders Acts 15. The church in Ephesus had elders Acts 21:18, and the church in Crete was encouraged to appoint elders Titus 1:5. The office of an elder is one that is approved by the Godhead.

1. The Elder is described as God's Steward. Titus 1:7.
2. The Pastor is an office held with the Son's approval. Ephesians 4:11.
3. The Bishop, 'overseer', is appointed through the work of the Holy Spirit. Acts 20:28.

What are the roles of the elders? Their role is described in the Bible names.

1. Elder, 'presbuteros'. 2. Bishop, 'episkopos'. 3. Pastors, 'poimen'.

These words describe a man who is older and experienced in the faith, i.e., 'an elder', a person who is a decision-maker, manager of church affairs, and leader, i.e., 'bishop', and one who maintains a careful watch for the spiritual needs of all the members of the flock, i.e., 'pastor'.

Ultimately, the role of an elder is to feed, tend, protect and lead the church, Acts 20:28 / 1 Peter 5:1-3.

"After going through Pisidia, they came into Pamphylia, and when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia. From Attalia, they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed. On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. And they stayed there a long time with the disciples." Acts 14:24-28

Paul and Barnabas retraced their steps all the way back to Antioch, where they had first been separated for the work. They went through Pisidia, came into Pamphylia, and after preaching in Perga, they went to Attalia and from Attalia they sailed back to Antioch, Acts 14:24.

Ramsay, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Paul and Barnabas crossed Taurus (probably in A.D. 48, certainly in the summer season) and returned through Pamphylia to Syrian Antioch.’

Longenecker, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Ports in antiquity were often satellite towns of larger and more important cities situated some distance inland for protection from pirates. So Luke’s mention of Attalia here probably has no more significance than his mention of Seleucia, [Acts 13:4](#), the port of Syrian Antioch, and merely identifies the place of embarkation for the voyage back to Syria.’

And when they returned there, they got the whole church to assemble and related to them all God had accomplished on their journey, [Acts 14:26-27](#) / [Acts 13:13-14](#). Notice two important components of report recording.

First of all, they wanted the whole church to know what had been done because they were the ones who sent them on this mission trip in the first place, [Acts 14:27](#). And that’s what they did, they gave them an honest report of all the good things and the things which needed more prayer.

Secondly, which I believe is highly important, they gave God all the credit. God did it all; He opened the doors for the Gentiles, [Acts 14:27](#) / [1 Corinthians 16:9](#) / [2 Corinthians 2:12](#) / [Colossians 4:3](#) / [Philippians 3:12-14](#), and so, they gave the credit where credit is due.

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Paul and Barnabas never thought that it was their strength or their power which had achieved anything. They spoke of what God had done with them. We will begin to have the right idea of Christian service when we work, not for our own honour or prestige, but only from the conviction that we are tools in the hand of God.’

Paul and Barnabas finished their reports and stayed for a good while with the brethren in Antioch, [Acts 14:28](#).

CHAPTER 15

INTRODUCTION

“Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.” This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question”. Acts 15:1-2

THE COUNCIL AT JERUSALEM

We left Paul and Barnabas in Antioch, encouraging all the believers by telling them what God had done through them and how God had opened a door for them to preach to the Gentiles, [Acts 14:26-27](#).

If there is one thing we know as Christians, it is that there are and there will always be questions that need to be answered. And when those questions come, we need to go out of our way to answer them. And that’s what Luke tells us happens next here.

Luke tells us that certain men who were apparently Pharisees and were in close association with James caused a great uproar in the Gentile churches, [Acts 15:1](#) / [Galatians 2:12](#).

Bruce, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The Epistle to the Galatians enables us to fill out the brief summary here provided by Luke.’

What they were teaching was submission to the Law of Moses, as demonstrated by circumcision, which was required for a person to be saved, [Acts 15:1](#) / [Exodus 12:48-49](#) / [Isaiah 56:6](#) / [Acts 13:39](#) / [Acts 15:24](#).

They also taught that it was improper for a Jewish Christian to eat with Gentile Christians, especially those who had not been circumcised, [Galatians 2:11-13](#). Their teaching didn’t go unnoticed; their teachings led to Paul and Barnabas raising some serious questions with each other, [Acts 15:2](#).

And now, the united church has split into two distinct camps, circumcised and uncircumcised. And it appears from the text that Barnabas was taking part in the Judaizers’ acts of hypocrisy, [Acts 15:2](#) / [Galatians 2:12-13](#).

Williams, in his commentary, says the following.

‘It was one thing to accept the occasional God-fearer into the church, someone already in sympathy with Jewish ways; it was quite another to welcome large numbers of Gentiles who had no regard for the law and no intention of keeping it.’

Commanded by the Lord and commissioned by the church in Antioch, Paul, Barnabas, and some unnamed others went to Jerusalem to get answers to those questions, [Acts 15:3](#).

The other men would include Titus, [Galatians 2:1](#) and [Galatians 2:2](#), says that Paul went up ‘by revelation’.

Remember, the church is still in its infancy, and already we’re beginning to see a division within the Lord’s church between the circumcised and uncircumcised.

“The church sent them on their way, and as they travelled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the brothers very glad.” [Acts 15:3](#)

Notice a very important point in the very here. When Paul and Barnabas were on their journey, they didn’t stop everywhere and tell everyone they met about the problems the church in Antioch was having. Instead, the group reported the conversions which had been occurring in the Gentile world because of the preaching of the Gospel, [Acts 15:3](#).

Notice also that they didn’t rejoice in the things which Paul and Barnabas had accomplished; they rejoiced because of the things that God had accomplished, [Acts 15:3](#). Paul and Barnabas didn’t speak to anyone about the problems in Antioch until they got to the people they wanted to ask the questions to.

The point I’m trying to make is that what we talk to others about is our choice. If all we focus on is problems, we’re going to miss out on the things which God is accomplishing in front of our eyes, [Proverbs 10:19-21](#). News travels fast these days, especially with the internet and telephones, but it never ceases to amaze me how news travelled fast during Biblical times.

“When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them. Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, “The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses.” [Acts 15:4-5](#)

Luke tells us that when Paul and Barnabas arrived in Jerusalem, they again reported on the good which had been done among the Gentiles, [Acts 15:4](#). It appears from [Galatians 2](#) that Paul first reported to a small group of reputable men. Why did he do that? Why didn’t he gather everyone together? Simply because he didn’t want to cause even more division within the Lord’s church.

Paul spoke to a small group of men first because by doing that, he could avoid a public confrontation between the apostles. Luke says that converts from among the Pharisees still pressed their point by saying that all Gentiles who wanted to go to heaven would have to submit to the Law of Moses, Acts 15:5.

Marshall, in his commentary, says the following.

‘It is possible that nationalist pressure (against Rome) was increasing in Judea, and that (Jewish) Christians were having to tread carefully to avoid being thought of as disloyal to their Jewish heritage.’

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The Old Testament taught that Gentiles would share in the promises made to Israel, Genesis 22:18 / Genesis 26:4 / Genesis 28:14 / Isaiah 49:6 / Isaiah 55:5-7 / Zephaniah 3:9-10 / Zechariah 8:22. The Old Testament prophets also spoke of Gentile salvation as happening in the last days, Isaiah 2:2 / Isaiah 11:10 / Isaiah 25:8-9 / Zechariah 8:23, through the witness of a restored Israel, Isaiah 2:3 / Isaiah 60:2-3 / Zechariah 8:23.’

What we see happening here in Acts is a perfect example of a grace plus Gospel, where people say we need to obey the Gospel of Christ, but we also need to be circumcised in the flesh to be saved.

Legalism is nothing new; in fact, it’s still very popular within certain religious groups, 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16.

There are too many legalistic Christians in the world who are quick to condemn some people because of something they don’t agree with.

There are too many Christians who make huge issues out of things like what translation of the Bible we all must use. We can only use the favourite hymns from the church hymnbook for singing. We can only worship in a building that doesn’t have a kitchen in it.

We don’t rely on anything we do for salvation, but we totally rely on what Christ has done for our salvation, Ephesians 2:8-9. In other words, we don’t try to be faithful to live the Christian life for our salvation; we try to live the Christian life faithfully because of our salvation.

We need to keep away from the Jesus plus plan of salvation because all that does is create a legalistic attitude among the saints, where some saints think they are better than others, Romans 14:1 / 2 Corinthians 10:12-13. Paul and Barnabas have some questions from the saints in Antioch and these other circumcised believers in Jerusalem which need to be answered.

“The apostles and elders met to consider this question. After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: “Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are. The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them.” Acts 15:6-12

Luke says that the questions which needed to be answered were placed before the apostles and elders, and it appears as though quite a discussion followed, Acts 15:6. And I think that this too is an important point to raise here.

Luke says, ‘after much discussion,’ Peter addressed the rest of them. Acts 15:7. A discussion involves more than one person, and the reason I believe this is important is that we need to have many resources to get our answers.

We shouldn’t just settle for an answer from one person; we need to look at our resources and ask as many people as we can. And that’s what these people did, and then Peter addressed the rest of those gathered, Acts 15:7.

Although Peter's actions were not always commendable, as when he dissembled in Antioch, it is clear that the apostle knew the truth. He insisted that God intended for the Gentiles to receive salvation through Jesus, and such was the rule of authority for the church, [Acts 15:7](#) / [Acts 10:28](#).

He reminded them that God had sent him to the house of Cornelius to preach the Gospel, and they were accepted on the basis of the same obedient faith demonstrated by the Jews on Pentecost, [Acts 15:7-9](#) / [Romans 3:22](#).

He asked why they would burden them with a law that neither they nor their fathers had been able to keep? [Acts 15:10](#) / [Matthew 23:4](#) / [Galatians 3:2-3](#) / [Galatians 5:1](#).

In fact, Peter said placing such a requirement on the Gentiles would tempt God. Instead of meriting salvation through perfect law-keeping, all would be saved by the grace of God, [Acts 15:11](#) / [Galatians 2:11-14](#).

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following concerning everyone becoming silent, [Acts 15:12](#).

'This thunderbolt just delivered by Peter completely silenced the Pharisaical Christian party, leaving the vast body of the Jerusalem church, assembled for the occasion, silent and ready to give full attention to the report of Barnabas and Paul.'

Luke tells us that the stage was now set for Paul and Barnabas' dramatic report of the miracles God had worked through them among the Gentiles, [Acts 15:12](#).

"When they finished, James spoke up: "Brothers, listen to me. Simon has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself. The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written: "'After this I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, that the remnant of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things' that have been known for ages. "It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God". Acts 15:13-19

Luke tells us that James, the Lord's brother, [Matthew 13:55](#), [Jude 1:1](#) / [James 1:1](#), asked the group to listen to him as he reminded them of Simon Peter's work with Cornelius, [Acts 15:13-14](#).

It was God who first intervened to choose a people for his name from the Gentiles, [Acts 15:14](#) / [Galatians 3:7](#) / [Galatians 3:29](#) / [Romans 2:28-29](#). And he went on to quote from [Amos 9:11-12](#), which he saw as referring prophetically to the inclusion of the Gentiles in God's people, [Acts 15:15-18](#).

Robertson, in his commentary, says the following.

'The passage in Amos refers primarily to the restoration of the Davidic empire, but also the Messiah's Kingdom (the throne of David, his father,' [Luke 1:32](#)).'

Notice James also quotes [Isaiah 45:21](#) in [Acts 15:18](#) to reinforce his argument.

Marshall, in his commentary, says the following.

'The thought that the church was the divinely intended replacement for the temple is probably to be seen in [Acts 15:16-18](#).'

James says this has always been God's plan from the very beginning, that all those who weren't Jews would be welcomed into God's kingdom. And so James said that he judged that they should not place legalistic requirements on the Gentiles which God had not placed on them, [Acts 15:19](#) / [Galatians 1:7](#).

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following.

'The rest either argued on the subject, or gave their opinion; James alone pronounced the definitive sentence.'

All legalists do is throw us into confusion, but they will pay the penalty for doing so, [Galatians 5:10](#). However, here, instead of the church in Antioch going into confusion, they went somewhere else for another opinion on the matter. And so James goes on to list four simple rules for the Gentile Christians to follow.

“Instead, we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath.” Acts 15:20-21

James advised that the council write to churches and basically tell them they were not to eat of things polluted by idol worship or participate in sexual immorality, which was sometimes associated with idol worship, Acts 15:20. They also were not to eat meat from an animal that died by strangulation or the blood of animals, Acts 15:20.

These last two rules actually predated the Law of Moses, Acts 15:21. They were first essentially given to Noah just after the flood. Just after the flood, God said to Noah, ‘But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it’, Genesis 9:4. But since the Law of Moses was still being read in the synagogues, this served as a good means of maintaining fellowship, 1 Corinthians 8:13.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘James was not putting Gentile converts under the Mosaic Law by imposing these restrictions. He was urging them to limit their exercise of Christian liberty to make their witness to unsaved Jews more effective and their fellowship with saved Jews more harmonious, 1 Corinthians 9:19-23.’

“Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, two men who were leaders among the brothers. With them, they sent the following letter.” Acts 15:22-23

The group decided to send Paul and Barnabas back to the Gentiles along with some men closely associated with the apostles and elders in Jerusalem, Acts 15:22. Judas Barnabas and Silas were specially selected to go help deliver a letter that explained the thinking of the assembled group, Acts 15:22-23.

Why did the church choose these men to deliver the letter? No one is sure, but one commentator suggests that these men might have been sent because they had not been associated with converting the Gentiles and would be ‘above suspicion and of undue partiality toward them’.

He went on to suggest that they ‘might use their influence with the Jewish brethren to encourage them to accept the teaching of the letter’. The reason why they sent these men isn’t vital to our understanding of this passage; what’s important is the content of the letter itself.

THE COUNCIL’S LETTER TO GENTILE BELIEVERS

“The apostles and elders, your brothers, To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia: Greetings. “We have heard that some went out from us without our authorisation and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said. So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing. It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things. Farewell.” Acts 15:24-29

Notice the letter was written specifically to the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia, Acts 15:24. We must remember that there would have been Jews within these churches too.

The false teachings on circumcision which certain people brought to them were obviously causing a lot of confusion within these churches, which was deeply troubling them, Acts 15:24 / Acts 15:1 / 1 Corinthians 4:6.

Men were chosen to send the letter, including Barnabas and Paul, who had risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, [Acts 15:25-26](#). Judas and Silas were sent to confirm what had been said and the decision which came from the meeting with the council, [Acts 15:27](#).

It seemed good not only to the Holy Spirit but also to the council in Jerusalem that the churches shouldn't be burdened any longer over the question of circumcision, [Acts 15:28](#) / [Acts 15:19](#) / [1 Corinthians 4:6](#).

Pierson, in his commentary, says the following.

‘They boldly treat the Holy Spirit as one of their number, a fellow-counsellor, who unites with them in the announcement of a joint conclusion; as though he, the Spirit of God, had sat with them in their deliberations.’

The letter contained four requirements for the Gentiles, which they were encouraged to avoid, [Acts 15:29](#). We've already established that this chapter demonstrates that the Law of Moses was not to be bound on Gentiles for their salvation.

James' conclusion concerning those Gentiles who were turning to God was not to trouble them except to inform them to avoid the following four things.

1. Things polluted by idols.

In other words, things associated with the worship of idols, like various kinds of meats. The apostle Paul made it clear that there was nothing sinful in eating meat that had been offered to idols, [1 Corinthians 8:1-6](#). However, some Christians with Jewish backgrounds at that time thought it was sinful to eat such meat, [1 Corinthians 8:7](#).

Remember that the Lord's church is still in its infancy at this point, but can you see the danger here? This was a barrier endangering the fellowship between these two groups in this infant stage of the church. Therefore, the Christian thing to do was to avoid eating such meat if it would cause a brother to stumble, [1 Corinthians 8:9-13](#).

My point is, James was saying that Christian love on the part of those Gentile converts should motivate them to avoid such things associated with the worship of idols. In fact, James says that it was 'necessary' to do that.

2. They were to avoid fornication.

3. They were to avoid the eating of things strangled.

Why strangled food? Simply because the blood had not been drained from the animal.

4. They were to stay clear of the eating of blood.

Now, common sense tells us that other things were sinful and forbidden by God, whether one was of a Gentile or Jewish background. But why were these four things specified by James?

It appears these four things were specified because they were sins that were very common among the Gentiles. In fact, these were things that most Gentiles did not think were sinful, and now we see why this special emphasis was needed.

These four things also caused a very large barrier to social and religious unity among the Christians with Jewish and Gentile backgrounds. But I also think it is important for us to note that these things were not just forbidden by the Law of Moses.

In other words, even Noah was told about the sinfulness of eating blood, and that was 'before' God gave the Law through Moses, [Genesis 9:3-4](#). Do these restrictions still apply to Christians today? Let us look at those four restrictions again.

First, things polluted by idols. There is absolutely no doubt that any form of idolatry is forbidden by God, Galatians 5:20. However, the eating of meats offered to idols is acceptable as long as it does not wound the conscience of a beloved brother or sister in Christ, 1 Corinthians 8.

The second restriction is fornication. Fornication is another work of the flesh, which is sinful and will keep us from heaven if we do not repent of it, Galatians 5:19-21.

The third restriction was eating things strangled. I believe that the context of this chapter shows us that every effort was being made to accommodate the new Gentile converts by not placing unnecessary burdens upon them. They have been accepted by God based on the death of Jesus.

However, since the church embraces both Gentiles and Jews, a courteous concession needs to be made on behalf of the Jewish believers. Nothing must be done by the Gentiles to cause needless offence to Jewish brethren. The Gentiles, ‘out of a spirit of love’, must make some adjustments to their menu and their moral behaviour.

Remember that immorality was viewed as a terrible sin by the Jews, whereas the Gentiles would not have been as offended by such behaviour, even though it was wrong.

I don’t think that the decision of the council is applicable today. Why? Because they were dealing with a specific problem that does not confront us today, at least in this country. Yes, the principle remains in force, but nothing more.

But the fourth restriction was eating the blood. Can we eat meat with blood in it today? It is important to recognise that the law prohibiting the use of blood for food does not come from the Mosaic Law. It preceded the law and existed in the Patriarchal Age, Genesis 9. This is the first indication of the importance that God attached to blood. The Covenant with Noah was after the flood had subsided and Noah and his family had emerged from the Ark that God spoke about the Covenant, which was to be made, not merely with Noah but with ‘every living creature of all flesh’.

Notice the terms that God used in speaking about the covenant, because they are both important and significant, Genesis 9:9-17. Notice what God says, He says in Genesis 9:9, ‘I establish My covenant with you and with your seed after you.’

He calls it ‘My covenant’ in Genesis 9:11. He says that ‘the covenant is for all perpetual generations’ in Genesis 9:12. In Genesis 9:13, He says it’s ‘a covenant between Me and the earth.’

In Genesis 9:15, He says, ‘I will remember My covenant’. And in Genesis 9:16, he says it’s an ‘everlasting covenant between God and every living creature’. And finally, in Genesis 9:17, He says it’s a ‘covenant which I have established between Me and all flesh that is upon the earth.’

Remember that this law was not given to Hebrews, Israelites, or Jews alone, because the passage makes clear that the Covenant that God made was made with all mankind, as an ‘everlasting covenant’, the sign of which remains with us even today, the Rainbow!

As so to answer the question, can we eat meat with blood in it today? Not according to what God said to Noah, yes, the Law of Moses isn’t binding anymore. But this isn’t dealing with the law of Moses; the issue of blood here is dealing with an ongoing covenant.

“The men were sent off and went down to Antioch, where they gathered the church together and delivered the letter. The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message. Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the brothers. After spending some time there, they were sent off by the brothers with the blessing of peace to return to those who had sent them. But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, where they and many others taught and preached the word of the Lord.” Acts 15:30-35

The trip that Paul and Barnabas made between Antioch, [Acts 11:30](#), and Jerusalem and back consisted of about five hundred and sixty miles, [Acts 12:25](#) / [Galatians 2:1-10](#).

Luke says that they got to Antioch, where a multitude of believers assembled to hear the letter from the apostles and elders, [Acts 15:30](#). After they heard they were to be accepted into the church without submitting to the Law of Moses, there was great rejoicing, [Acts 15:31](#).

Further words of encouragement were delivered by Judas and Silas, who Luke says were prophets, [Acts 15:32](#) / [Acts 14:22](#). The brethren told them they could return to Jerusalem after they had spent an unspecified amount of time with them, [Acts 15:33](#). Note that some manuscripts tell us that Silas apparently chose to remain in Antioch, [Acts 15:34](#). Instead of division, there was love. Instead of using a spirit of anger, they used a spirit of love. Instead of getting into all the rights and wrongs, they approached the matter sensitively and created great joy and peace within the Lord's church, [Matthew 5:11-12](#) / [Romans 12:18](#).

DISAGREEMENT BETWEEN PAUL AND BARNABAS

“Sometime later Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing.” Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus. But Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches”. [Acts 15:36-41](#)

The apostle Paul knew the importance of continued teaching and encouragement for young churches. He understood what it was like to be a baby, and so to avoid leaving these young converts to look after themselves, Paul approached Barnabas, [Acts 4:36](#) / [Acts 9:26-27](#), who was John Mark's cousin, [Colossians 4:10](#), about visiting the brethren in all the cities in which they had previously preached, [Acts 15:36](#).

If there is one lesson the church can learn from this, it's this: young converts need teaching and encouragement, [Acts 2:42](#). Jesus says to teach them, baptise them and teach them again, [Matthew 28:19-20](#). That's one of the reasons why Paul wanted to go back to these young converts, [Acts 15:36](#).

It appears from our text that Barnabas had a strong desire to take his cousin, John Mark, on the journey, but for some reason, Paul did not want to go with John Mark, [Acts 15:37-38](#).

Luke tells us that John Mark had earlier left Paul and his companions to return to Jerusalem, [Acts 15:38](#) / [Acts 13:13](#). But both Paul and Barnabas were so firm in their opinions, even to the point of being provoked to anger, that they had to separate, [Acts 15:39](#).

We must note that although they had a big dispute, they couldn't agree with one another, even though they separated under the cloud of anger. This did not stop them from focusing on the good things about each other.

Paul chose to remember the good about Barnabas. In fact, Paul later used Barnabas as a good example of one who worked to support himself while preaching the Gospel, [1 Corinthians 9:6](#).

Paul also chose to remember the good about John Mark, [Philemon 4:24](#). He described John Mark as one who was useful in ministry, [2 Timothy 4:11](#). The point is that despite this early dispute between them, neither of them allowed the dispute to hinder the work of God.

Luke tells us that God used the disagreement between these two great men of faith to produce two teams to go in different directions with the Gospel. And so Barnabas went with John Mark to Cyprus, which was his homeland, [Acts 4:36](#).

It seems as though Paul took Silas, one of the leading men among the brethren at Jerusalem, with him, [Acts 15:40](#) / [Acts 15:22](#). And it appears he had to return from Jerusalem, but Luke doesn't give us the details of how he and Paul got together. But as Barnabas and John Mark were heading off in one direction with the Gospel, Paul and Silas were moving in another direction.

PAUL'S SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY

From [Acts 15-18](#), we read about Paul's second missionary journey, sometime late in 50 A.D. or early in 51 A.D. He travelled to Derbe, Lystra, Phrygia, Galatia, Troas, Philippi, Thessalonica, Athens, Corinth, Ephesus, and Caesarea. Paul's second missionary journey ended in Jerusalem.

Paul and Silas went through Syria and Cilicia to southern Galatia, and along the way, they strengthened the churches, [Acts 15:41](#). And its whilst they are on this journey that we are introduced to a young man named Timothy in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 16

INTRODUCTION

“He came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was a Jewess and a believer, but whose father was a Greek. The brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. As they travelled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.” Acts 16:1-5

TIMOTHY JOINS PAUL AND SILAS

Paul and Silas arrived in Derbe, which was the place where he had great success, [Acts 14:20-21](#), and Lystra, is the place where a crowd tried to worship Paul and Barnabas as pagan gods on the first missionary journey, and where the apostle Paul was stoned almost to death, [Acts 14:8-20](#).

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

Paul returned with Silas and discovered a young convert with great potential. His name is Timothy, whose mother was Eunice; he was a Jewish convert with a Greek father but more importantly, he was highly recommended by the brethren, [Acts 16:1](#) / [1 Corinthians 4:17](#).

WHY DID PAUL HAVE TIMOTHY CIRCUMCISED BUT NOT TITUS?

Sometimes in the Scriptures, we come across an event that appears, on the surface, to be confusing, misleading or contrary to other Scriptures. One such event is recorded in here, when the apostle Paul took his young friend Timothy and had him circumcised, **Acts 16:3**.

Paul knew the old covenant was nailed to the cross, **Colossians 2:13-15**, and he was very much aware that there's no need for anyone to be circumcised anymore, **1 Corinthians 7:19 / Galatians 5:2 / Galatians 5:6**, but why would Paul have Timothy circumcised? **Acts 15:2 / Acts 15:12**.

We also know on another occasion, Paul refused to let Titus be circumcised, **Galatians 2:3-5**. Why was that? Was he hypocritical in his dealings with Timothy and Titus? Before we answer these questions, let's go ahead and look at the context of both these events.

On the surface, it appears as though Paul had Timothy circumcised because of peer pressure from the Jews but notice that these same Jews knew that Timothy's father was Greek, **Acts 16:3**.

They concluded that because his father was a Greek, not a Jew, **Acts 15:2 / Acts 15:12**. Timothy wouldn't be circumcised, and just like his father, wouldn't be practising Judaism.

Of course, they may have come to the wrong conclusion about Timothy being circumcised because many people from other cultures became Jews throughout history, **Joshua 5:6-7**.

On this occasion, their conclusions were correct concerning Timothy, and so, in accordance with the Law of Moses, Timothy was circumcised because he had the legal right to do so.

TITUS

It's important to remember that Paul is dealing with legalism and false teachers throughout the Book of Galatians, **Galatians 2:3-5**. These people were insisting that Jesus didn't do enough for people to be saved, and so, they were teaching that everyone needed to be circumcised too, **Acts 15:1**.

Notice that it says the reason Titus wasn't circumcised was that it would have 'made them slaves' and 'the truth of the Gospel might be preserved,' **Galatians 2:4-5**.

In other words, if Paul had given in to Titus being circumcised, to please these false believers, then that would have nullified the Gospel; it would have discredited everything Jesus had taught and done.

It would have undone everything which had been taught about being right with God by faith and enforced on others the idea of being right with God is through law-keeping, i.e. circumcision.

DIFFERENT CHARACTERS

When we look at Timothy and Titus, we can see that they are both completely different characters. The first difference is that Titus had parents who were both Greek, **Galatians 2:3**, while Timothy had a Jewish mother, Jewish grandmother, **2 Timothy 1:5**, but a Greek father, **Acts 16:3**.

Titus doesn't appear to have had any Jewish upbringing, whilst Paul tells us that Timothy had been raised by being taught the Old Testament Scriptures from childhood, **2 Timothy 3:15**.

This implies that his Jewish mother, Eunice and his Jewish grandmother, Lois, brought him up as a Jew. Although we don't know, it's highly possible that Timothy's Greek father was happy for him to be raised as a Jew but refused to allow him to be circumcised.

Imagine having parents, one is a believer, and the other isn't, the father is happy for their son or daughter to go and worship God and study His Word with their mother and other Christians. However, he won't allow their son or daughter to be baptised to become a true Christian.

DIFFERENT CIRCUMSTANCES

When we look at the events surrounding Timothy being circumcised and Titus not being circumcised, we can see that they are both completely different circumstances.

For example, in Galatians, Paul was dealing with those false believers, those so-called Christians, who were insisting that all Christians must also be circumcised. The genuine Christians in Galatia were being pressured into being circumcised by these legalistic Christians in order to be accepted.

But notice in the Acts event, that 'the believers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him', that is Timothy, **Acts 16:2**. In other words, there were no Christians, no legalistic Christians putting any pressure on Timothy to be circumcised, as Titus had.

WAS PAUL BEING A HYPOCRITE?

Many people believe that Paul was being a hypocrite in the way he dealt with Timothy and Titus concerning their circumcision, but we must take into account that these are two different characters in two different circumstances.

Paul refused to allow Titus to be circumcised in Jerusalem, **Galatians 2:1**, because that action would have nullified the whole Gospel, but he had Timothy circumcised simply because he was going to be travelling with Paul and it would make his 'outreach' efforts to the Jews much easier, **Acts 16:3**.

Timothy would still be a Christian, but he would be accepted in Jewish society, therefore this would make his 'outreach' efforts easier in the long term.

HOW WOULD ANYONE KNOW YOU WERE CIRCUMCISED?

A question that comes up from time to time is, how would anyone know if Timothy or Titus were circumcised in the first place? In Bible times sharing the bathing facilities and toilet facilities was common practice, so it would be very easy for someone to notice if a person was circumcised or not.

I guess that Paul, Timothy and Titus could have bluffed their way through meetings with the Jews, but this would imply lying. The reality is that people would simply ask, kind of like what people do today when they are asked if they are a Christian.

When we look at all the evidence, it's clear that Titus' case was all about defending the freedom Christians find in Christ, whilst in Timothy's case, it was all about utilising that same freedom to win more souls for Christ.

It was freedom that led Paul not to allow Titus to be circumcised, and it was freedom that led Paul to allow Timothy to be circumcised, **1 Corinthians 9:20 / 1 Corinthians 10:23-24**.

Paul left with Timothy and Silas to carry the message from the meeting at Jerusalem to all the churches with which the apostle had previously worked, **Acts 16:4 / Acts 15:30**.

In this way, he prepared them to fend off the potential attacks of the Judaizers. Paul avoided another possibility of division, **Acts 15:1**, and the churches were strengthened in the faith and continued to grow in number, **Acts 16:5**.

“Paul and his companions travelled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas.” **Acts 16:6-8**

Just west of the cities in south Galatia was the Roman province of Asia, and Luke says Paul was forbidden by the Holy Spirit to enter that region to teach, **Acts 16:6**. This might have been done directly or through the agency of a prophet inspired by the Spirit, **Acts 20:23 / Acts 21:10-11**.

How it happened is not important, but one thing we do know is that it wasn't a part of God's plan at this point.

Because, as we will see later in **Acts 19**, Paul did get his opportunity to preach in Asia and the church grew there, **Acts 20:13-37**, as is evidenced by the Lord's letters, **Revelation 2-3**.

In the meantime, Paul and those with him continued to work their way along until they came to Mysia, which was at the northern border between Asia and Bithynia, **1 Peter 1:1**. They would have gone into Bithynia, but again, the Spirit of Jesus wouldn't let them go, **Acts 16:7 / Romans 8:9**.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The Spirit of Jesus is here recognised as exactly the same as the Spirit of God, indicating forcefully that the full deity and godhead of Jesus Christ was fully accepted and received by the Christians at that mid-point of the first century.’

They turned westward to Troas, **Acts 20:5**, and it was during this time that Paul received a vision, **Acts 16:8**.

PAUL'S VISION OF THE MAN OF MACEDONIA

“During the night, Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day on to Neapolis. From there, we travelled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.” **Acts 16:9-12**

They may not have understood why the Lord wouldn't allow them to go to Asia. They may not have even understood why the Lord wouldn't allow them to go to Bithynia.

But Paul and his company determined, after a vision the apostle had in the night, that the Lord wanted them to preach in Macedonia, **Acts 16:9-10**. Luke has already recorded other people who experienced visions, **Acts 9:10 / Acts 10:3 / Acts 10:17 / Acts 10:19 / Acts 11:5 / Acts 12:9 / Acts 13:4**.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following concerning Macedonia.

‘The Macedonians were a distinct national group, though they had strong ties to the Greeks. They had offered the most stubborn resistance against Rome’s efforts to extend its influence. In an attempt to break down their strong nationalistic spirit of independence, Rome divided Macedonian territory into four districts, each of which had its own local government under Rome. We see this stubborn character in the Macedonians’ reaction to Paul’s preaching. Nevertheless, once won over, the Macedonian converts became just as loyal to Paul as they had been hostile to him at first.’

Hughes, in his commentary, says the following concerning their trip by boat, **Acts 16:11**.

‘That they ‘sailed straight for Samothrace’ is quite revealing, because this is a nautical expression that means the wind was at their backs. So perfect were the winds that they sailed 156 miles in just two days, whereas returning the other way at a later time, **Acts 20:6**, it took five days.’

Note the word ‘we’, **Acts 16:11**, indicating that Luke himself is with them. We have this from **Acts 20:5**, to **Acts 21:18** and **Acts 27:1**, to **Acts 28:16**. So, they immediately made arrangements and set sail from Troas to Samothrace, then Neapolis and, finally, Philippi, which was a Roman colony and which Luke described as ‘the foremost city of that part of Macedonia, a colony’, **Acts 16:11-12**.

Hughes, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Philippi was “the place where the armies of Mark Antony and Octavian defeated Brutus and Cassius in the decisive battle of the second Roman civil war in 42 B.C.’

It’s in Philippi that we’re introduced to a woman named Lydia.

LYDIA’S CONVERSION IN PHILIPPI

“On the Sabbath, we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. “If you consider me a believer in the Lord,” she said, “come and stay at my house.” And she persuaded us.” **Acts 16:13-16**

It was customary to take ten Jewish heads of households and form a synagogue within a community. But here in Philippi, there was no synagogue; there was just a group of Jewish women who met by the riverside for prayer, **Acts 16:13 / Psalms 137:1 / Ezra 8:15 / Ezra 8:21**.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Claudius had banished the Jews from Rome and therefore from the colonies, **Acts 18:2**, and it may be that Philippi had obeyed this order.’ The river in this case was the Gangites.’

Paul’s company joined the women on the Sabbath day and spoke to them, and one of the women, whose name is Lydia, was a seller of purple and a worshiper of God, **Acts 16:14 / Acts 13:43 / Acts 18:7**.

The purple she sold was an expensive purple dye, made of the murex shell, and it was one of the most valuable commodities of antiquity. Lydia’s engaging in the trade of such a product surely indicates some considerable capital.

Did you notice where Lydia’s home city is? Lydia’s home city was Thyatira, **Acts 16:14**. We might wonder what’s so significant about that? Well, Thyatira is in the province of Asia. And so, even though Paul had been forbidden by the Lord to go to Asia personally, **Acts 16:6**, he actually got to teach one of its citizens.

Thyatira is also one of the seven churches in Asia minor who Jesus wrote to, **Revelation 2:18**. Some believe it was Lydia, who found Christianity clashing with her business.

She wanted the church to compromise and attend some heathen festivals, hence why Jesus writes to this church in Revelation, but there is no evidence of this.

THYATIRA

Thyatira was a town long recognised as a garrison town, and it was the gateway to the important areas of Asia Minor. It had no real religious significance, but it was a town of trade unions of every kind, and we know that **Acts 16:14** tells us that Lydia, the seller of purple garments, lived there.

Metal work flourished there, especially working with bronze. We know nothing about how church was established, but it is possible, like some of the other churches, that Paul or some of his students according to **Acts 19:10** may have established the church there. It may also be possible that Lydia went back home to establish the church.

The town of Thyatira lay in the mouth of a long valley, which connected the valleys of Hermus and the Caicus River. Today, there is still a railway that runs down the valley. And because of the great roads of the trade routes from Syria to Pergamum, it would have had some sort of strategic importance.

There must have been some sort of settlement there because in 290 BC its name emerged in history, and it was discovered as a military centre. If Thyatira fell, Pergamum lay open to attack. There was no hill to erect a lookout point, and this resulted in a town being fated to fight, be knocked down and built up again.

It was a great commercial centre because of its road and the valley brought trade from all over the world, and it was most famous for its wool trade and the dyeing industry.

Purple dye was very expensive, and it came from a little shellfish called a Murex. The dye was extracted from the throat. The Roman writer Pliny said that 1lb of purple dye cost around £100, and so Lydia must have been a wealthy woman, dealing in one of the costliest substances of the ancient world, **Acts 16:14**.

Thyatira was the centre for temples of Artemis and Apollo, but they were not especially famous. It's interesting that though this was the smallest of the churches addressed in the book of Revelation, it's the longest letter written, **Revelation 2:18-29**.

Notice the Lord opened her heart to respond to the message, **Acts 16:14**. God can only open the hearts of those who are willing to open their hearts, **John 6:44 / Romans 10:17 / 2 Corinthians 4:4**.

Luke doesn't go into the details of Paul's message to Lydia but common sense tells us it must have been the central message of the Gospel, **Acts 16:15 / Matthew 28:19-20 / Mark 16:15-16 / 1 Corinthians 15:1-4**.

Paul shared with Lydia the story about the death, burial and resurrection of Christ and Lydia and other members of her household obeyed the spoken word by being baptised, **Acts 16:15 / Acts 8:36**.

Paul must have explained the importance of baptism in terms of being united with Christ, **Romans 6:3-5**. Paul tells the Galatian Christians that they were all children of God by faith, **Galatians 3:26-28**. How did that happen?

It happened because when they were baptised into Christ, they entered by faith into Christ and clothed themselves with Christ so that there was no longer anything to divide them.

In other words, when Paul was preaching to Lydia, he explained the whole story about the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, and he explained what she needed to do to be right with God.

Lydia understood how the old covenant worked in relation to sin, but now she had her heart opened to the new covenant, **Jeremiah 31:33**, and she understood that to enter this new covenant with Christ, she needed to be baptised into Christ for the forgiveness of her sins, **Matthew 28:19-20 / Mark 16:15-16 / Acts 2:38**.

DeWelt, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The New Testament conversions all end with the baptism of the convert. Not with their prayer experience but with their baptism; not with their testimony, but with their baptism.’

After Lydia and her household were added to the Lord’s church, **Acts 2:47**, she then pleaded with Paul and the others to stay as guests in her house, **Acts 16:15 / Romans 12:13 / 1 Peter 4:9**.

Paul may have hesitated because she was a single woman, which appears to be indicated by the reference to her house, **Acts 16:15**. However, when she prefaced her request by saying, ‘if you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord’, Paul yielded. And so, here we have the first European converts to Christ.

Lydia didn’t wake up one morning and think to herself, I’ll go down to the river and pray, and I’ll become a Christian. No! God sent Paul to share the message with her.

She heard the message of Christ through Paul and God opened her heart to respond to the message, **Romans 10:17**. What Luke records next is just that very thing, but the reaction to the healing is interesting to say the least.

PAUL AND SILAS IN PRISON

“Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. This girl followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.” She kept this up for many days. Finally, Paul became so troubled that he turned around and said to the spirit, “In the name of Jesus Christ, I command you to come out of her!” At that moment, the spirit left her. When the owners of the slave girl realised that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. They brought them before the magistrates and said, “These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice.” The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten. After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks”. **Acts 16:16-24**

Luke reported that the group went for prayer, possibly daily and this demon-possessed slave girl who alleged could predict the future, followed them crying out, ‘these men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation,’ **Acts 16:16-17 / Mark 1:24 / Mark 3:11 / Mark 5:7 / Luke 4:34 / Luke 8:28**.

Boice, in his commentary, says the following.

‘It actually says, ‘She had a spirit of Pythona.’ That does not mean much to most of us, which is why it is not translated literally. But ‘pythona’ was a certain kind of snake, a python. It is used here because the Python was associated with the god Apollo, not far from Philippi, in this very area of Europe, there was a shrine to the Pythian Apollo.’

Let me share a few thoughts about so-called modern-day psychics and fortune-tellers, etc. I have often wondered how many of the speculative predictions that fit in the realm of the fantastic but have failed are ever revisited.

I am persuaded that the reason psychics, astrologers, fortune tellers, and such, like are an abomination to the Lord is because they encourage people to place their confidence in someone or something other than God and His will for their lives.

The only place we should be looking for guidance is in the Scriptures, Psalm 119:105, and there's no place on earth or in heaven that God cannot guide us, Psalm 139:7-10. God has blessed us with two compasses to help guide us; He has blessed us with a conscience and the Bible.

But our conscience is affected by our surroundings and by the way we have been taught or trained. The conscience has a history of giving inaccurate readings, Proverbs 14:12 / Proverbs 16:25. God has also blessed us with His Word, the Bible, and it is given to us as the more reliable compass to guide us when those big decisions of life are to be made.

Back in the Old Testament before God's people entered the Promised Land, God warned His people to stay away from people who are involved in any form of fortune-telling and He told them not to get involved with that kind of sinful acts, Deuteronomy 18:10-12 / Leviticus 20:27.

Make no mistake about it, people who practice these things or people who place their trust in these things will not enter the kingdom of heaven, Galatians 5:19-21 / Revelation 21:8.

Normally, we would think that anyone who proclaimed that these men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved, Acts 16:17, day after day, Acts 17:18, would be very helpful in furthering the Gospel, but Paul clearly did not think so. After all, the people believed this girl could foretell the future, and her masters made a considerable profit in the process, Acts 16:16 / Acts 16:19.

But to accept the recommendation of demons would have been to lend credence to anything else the demon might have made her say, even lies, Matthew 8:28-34 / Mark 3:11-12. And so, Paul cast out the demon by the authority of Jesus, Acts 16:18 / Matthew 17:21.

Look at the reaction of her masters, after Paul had healed her, they only saw one thing, they saw their income going right out the window, Acts 16:19 / Acts 19:24-27.

McGarvey and others have pointed out a somewhat humorous pun in Luke's Greek at this place. He said, 'that when the evil spirit WENT OUT, the masters saw that the hope of their gain WENT OUT.'

I often wonder if this young slave girl ever became a Christian. They grabbed Paul and Silas and dragged them before the authorities in the marketplace, Acts 16:19.

They took them to the magistrates and accused them of being Jews, throwing their city into an uproar by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice, Acts 16:20-21.

Tannehill, in his commentary, says the following.

'The accusation against Paul and Silas in Acts 16:20-21 is one of a series. In Acts 16-19 we find four scenes that feature accusations against Christians, and these accusations are parts of similar sequences of events. The sequence contains three basic elements: 1. Christians are forcefully brought before officials or a public assembly. 2. They are accused, and this accusation is highlighted by direct quotation. 3. We are told the result of this attempt to curb the Christian mission.'

Once again, we see the mob rule and the magistrates had Paul and Silas beaten, 2 Corinthians 11:23 / 2 Corinthians 11:25, cast into the inner prison and their feet placed in stocks, Acts 16:22-24.

Bruce, in his commentary, says the following.

'These stocks had more than two holes for legs, which could thus be forced apart in a such a way as to cause the utmost discomfort and cramping pain.'

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

'Acts records only two instances in which Gentiles threatened or harmed Paul, Acts 19:23-41. In both cases people were losing money in vested interests, and in both cases a Roman official vindicated Paul.'

We would think her masters would be grateful that this girl was now demon-free and healed, but if our values are in the wrong place and all we see is an income and not a human life, then we won't place much value on human life.

“About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly, there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once, all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose. The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted, “Don't harm yourself! We are all here!” The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved-you and your household.” Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night, the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God-he and his whole family”. Acts 16:25-34

Paul and Silas are in prison for doing good, but what they are doing is just amazing, they are rejoicing. Luke tells us that at midnight, while the other prisoners listened to Paul and Silas singing and praying, Psalms 42:8, and a great supernatural earthquake shook open all the prison doors and released all those bound in stocks, Acts 16:25-26 / Acts 5:18-20 / Acts 12:3-11.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘In some circumstances it is impossible to draw a line between the natural and the supernatural; but the conduct of the mistreated apostles in that jail was such that, when the earthquake came (from whatever cause), every listener who had heard them praying and singing would at once have concluded that God had thus answered their petitions; and we do not hesitate to draw the same conclusion. The circumstance of every door being opened and all stocks being released encourages the deduction that God here acted on behalf of his servants.’

Believing his prisoners had escaped, the Jailor prepared to kill himself rather than face the torturous Roman judgment. But Paul stopped him by crying out that they were all there and he should not harm himself, Acts 16:27-28. Longenecker, in his commentary, says the following.

‘In Roman law a guard who allowed his prisoner to escape was liable to the same penalty the prisoner would have suffered (Code of Justinian 9.4.4).’

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Not many suicides are mentioned in the Bible. There are those of Samson, Judges 16:29-30, Saul and his armor-bearer, 1 Samuel 31:4-5 / 1 Chronicles 10:4-5, Ahithophel, 2 Samuel 17:23, Zimri, 1 Kings 16:18, and Judas Iscariot, Acts 1:18. In pagan lands, however, suicide was an accepted manner of solving a problem, as in the case before us.’

The jailor saw no reason to carry on living, but Paul is about to give him one good reason: Jesus. The jailor called for lights, leapt into the prison in trembling fear, fell before Paul and Silas, brought them out and asked, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ Acts 16:29-30 / Acts 2:37 / Acts 16:30 / Acts 22:10.

The inspired response was the same as any other conversion we find in the Book of Acts. The questions were similar, but the response was always the same. It was the same in the beginning when Peter preached to the Jewish brethren on Pentecost, Acts 2:37-39. It was the same on the Damascus road for the apostle Paul, Acts 22:10.

The jailor was told, ‘believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household,’ Acts 16:31. And so Paul and Silas spoke the Word of the Lord to him so that faith could be produced, Acts 16:32 / Romans 10:17. At the same hour of the night, he washed their stripes, Acts 16:33, which is clear evidence of repentance, Acts 2:38 / 2 Corinthians 7:10. It's possible that some of the wounds were caused by the guard in the first place.

Immediately afterwards, he and all the members of his household were baptised, **Acts 16:33**, just like Peter's audience did, **Acts 2:38**, and just like the apostle, Paul himself did, **Acts 9:18**.

Luke tells us then, and only then, 'he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household', **Acts 16:34**. The jailor and his household weren't saved just because they believed. They had to do something with that belief, they needed to express that belief in action.

Their action was to follow the commands which Paul and Silas gave them, and that was to be baptised into Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. The rejoicing didn't begin until after they had been baptised into Christ. Why?

Because that was the point in time when their sins were washed away, and they received the gift of the Holy Spirit, **Acts 2:38**, and they entered into a new relationship with Christ Himself, **Matthew 28:19-20 / Romans 6:1-4**. And so the church which meets at Philippi is beginning to grow, thanks to God adding to their number.

"When it was daylight, the magistrates sent their officers to the jailer with the order: "Release those men." The jailer told Paul, "The magistrates have ordered that you and Silas be released. Now you can leave. Go in peace." But Paul said to the officers: "They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out." The officers reported this to the magistrates, and when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed. They came to appease them and escorted them from the prison, requesting them to leave the city. After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and encouraged them. Then they left." **Acts 16:35-40**

Luke tells us that the next morning, the magistrates were sent to the prison to quietly release Paul and Silas, but the apostle refused to go quietly, **Acts 16:35-37**. Why? One possibility is that Paul wanted the authorities to realize even Roman citizens had believed in Jesus.

Remember that a Roman could not be beaten and imprisoned without due process of law, **Acts 16:37**, and so it is possible that Paul had tried to stop the previous day's actions by appealing to his citizenship but he had been ignored, **Acts 16:38 / Acts 22:22-23:11**. And now, he would only leave the jail if the magistrates personally escorted him, **Acts 16:39 / Acts 16:37**.

Instead of being run out of town, they were asked to leave but before they went, they, probably including Luke, returned to Lydia's house and encouraged the brethren there first before they bid them farewell, **Acts 16:40**. Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'There is something astounding about this. Those men who had been so shamefully treated, abused, beaten, illegally cast into prison, suffering the torture of stocks in the inner dungeon, those men comforted the brethren! How noble, unselfish and beautiful is that scene in which men whose backs were still raw and bloody from the scourge are cast in the role of comforters for young Christians whose distress at such events, while real enough, was nevertheless mental rather than physical. This is one of the grandest statements in Scripture.'

CHAPTER 17

INTRODUCTION

"When they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am

proclaiming to you is the Christ,” he said. Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women.” Acts 17:1-4

IN THESSALONICA

In the previous chapter, we left Paul and Silas being freed from prison miraculously but they also freed a bunch of people from their sins and a slave girl who was now freed from demon possession. And they both left Philippi after spending some time with Lydia and her household.

In this chapter, we find Paul and Silas on their second missionary journey to Thessalonica, [Acts 17:1](#). If you’re the apostle Paul and your trade is preaching, you will always know your audience and know exactly what to say and sometimes that means saying the words which are going to hurt most.

Luke didn’t tell us why Paul passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, but he did tell us that the next stop on this second missionary tour was Thessalonica, [Acts 17:1](#).

THESSALONICA

The city of Thessalonica was the capital and largest city of the Roman province of Macedonia, located on the Ignatian Way, which was a major road from Rome to the eastern provinces.

The city was named after the wife of Cassander, who built the city. Those in Thessalonica adored many gods, particularly Jupiter, as the father of Hercules, the alleged founder of its ancient royal family.

The city also boasted a celebrated amphitheatre, where gladiatorial shows were exhibited for the amusement of the citizens, and a circus for public games. Thessalonica’s location and use as a port made it a prominent city.

In 168 B.C., it became the capital of the second district of Macedonia and later it was made the capital and major port of the whole Roman province of Macedonia, 146 B.C. In 42 B.C., after the battle at Philippi, Thessalonica was made a free city. Thessalonica was the capital of one of the four Roman districts of Macedonia.

Philippi didn’t have a synagogue so Paul and Silas went to the place of prayer, [Acts 16:13](#), but here in Thessalonica, they had one, [Acts 17:1](#). Paul went to the synagogue for three consecutive Sabbath days to reason with the Jews, [Acts 13:5](#) / [Acts 13:14](#) / [Acts 14:1](#) / [Acts 17:17](#) / [Acts 18:4](#) / [Acts 18:19](#) / [Acts 19:8-9](#) / [Acts 24:25](#) / [Romans 1:16](#), about Jesus being the Messiah had to suffer and rise again from the grave, [Acts 17:2-3](#) / [Acts 3:18](#) / [Acts 13:30](#) / [Acts 13:34](#) / [Luke 24:13-27](#) / [1 Corinthians 15:1-4](#).

Hughes, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The Greek word translated ‘reasoned’ is the root for our English word dialogue. There was exchange, questions and answers. He dialogued with them ‘from the Scriptures.’

The very idea of a crucified Messiah was a stumbling block to the Jews, [1 Corinthians 1:23](#), but what Paul does here, he argues from the prophets, saying that that was precisely what God had foretold in [Isaiah 53](#), [Acts 17:3](#).

He goes on and establishes the fact that God had also planned and accomplished Jesus’ resurrection from the dead and made Him King over His people, [Acts 17:3](#) / [Acts 2:22-36](#) / [1 Corinthians 15:1-4](#).

In other words, all these things which were recorded by the prophets were fulfilled in Jesus Christ, [Acts 17:3](#). The scriptural evidence was supported by the miracles worked by the power of the Holy Spirit, [1 Thessalonians 1:5](#). There was more than enough proof that Jesus was the risen Messiah.

It was during these three weeks of teaching in the synagogue in Thessalonica that Paul and Silas worked with their own hands to support themselves, [1 Thessalonians 2:9](#), and the apostles received support from the brethren in Philippi on at least two occasions, [Philippians 4:15-16](#).

The point is, that the combination of scriptural preaching, the miracles and the apostle's obvious commitment to reach the lost had its desired effect. And we know that all that proof and effort was rewarded because Luke tells us that some Jews and Greeks who worshipped God and prominent women from the community obeyed the Gospel, [Acts 17:4](#).

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘His converts seem to have been mainly Gentiles, [1 Thessalonians 1:9](#), many of whom were God-fearers, [Acts 10:4](#) / [Acts 13:43](#) / [Acts 16:14](#), but some of them were Jews. Jason, [Acts 17:5](#), Aristarchus, [Colossians 4:10](#), and Secundus, [Acts 20:4](#), appear to have been among these new believers.’

It is those people whom Paul refers to when he writes to the church that meets at Thessalonica. What a great way to be remembered as a congregation, they used to worship idols but now they have turned to God, [1 Thessalonians 1:9](#). We should never forget who we used to be and where we came from, and who we are now, because the Bible clearly reminds us of who we were and what we have become.

We used to be dead in our sins but now God has made us alive in Christ Jesus, [Ephesians 2:1-5](#). We used to look to the world for the answers to life but now we turn to the living God for those answers.

And now, just like Paul and Silas did with these Jews and Gentiles, we are persuaded that Jesus truly is Lord over everything and our life needs to reflect that persuasion. It's only when we remember who we used to be in reference to being sinners, can we show those who are still dead in their sins the way back to life.

And so following on, what we have seen happening time and time again throughout the Book of Acts, there are those who are made alive in Christ and those who chose to remain dead in their sins, [2 Corinthians 2:16](#).

“But the Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason's house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd. But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other brothers before the city officials, shouting: “These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus.” When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil. Then they made Jason and the others post bond and let them go.” [Acts 17:5-9](#)

Luke says that Paul's words moved the unbelieving Jews to jealousy and so they enlisted the help of some troublemakers, caused a riot and stirred up a mob to go to Jason's house and bring Paul and Silas out, [Acts 17:5](#). Time and time again, we have seen this attitude of resentment towards the apostles for doing what is right, [Acts 13:45](#) / [Acts 13:50](#) / [Acts 14:2](#) / [Acts 14:5](#) / [Acts 14:19](#).

I guess if we can't find the people we're looking for, we will take the next best thing, and that's what the mob did. When they couldn't find the two missionaries, the mob dragged Jason and some brethren before the rulers of the city and then the accusations began to flow, [Acts 17:6](#).

They accused Paul and Silas of being part of the number who turned the world upside down by defying Ceasar, [Acts 18:2](#) / [John 19:15](#), and teaching that Jesus was King, [Acts 17:6-7](#) / [Luke 12:16-21](#) / [1 Thessalonians 3:13](#) / [1 Thessalonians 5:1-11](#) / [2 Thessalonians 1:5-10](#) / [2 Thessalonians 2:14](#) / [1 Timothy 6:15](#).

The accusations caused such a stir, the text says, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil, Acts 17:8. Notice from the text, that the rulers thought the matter was serious enough to require some security, Acts 17:9. Perhaps like a property bond of Jason and the others. And this basically served as a warning to them that if any further disturbance occurred by them then they would lose their property.

Bruce, in his commentary, says the following, concerning Acts 17:9.

‘This probably meant that Paul had to leave the city and that his friends guaranteed that he would not come back, at least during the present magistrates’ term of office. It is probably to this situation that Paul referred in 1 Thessalonians 2:18, that he greatly desired to go back, but ‘Satan hindered us.’

While Paul was away, the church continued in the faith, for which Paul thanked God, 1 Thessalonians 1:7-10 / 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16.

Wesley, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Paul maintained himself by his own labour, 1 Thessalonians 2:8-9, assisted by friends in Philippi, Philippians 4:15-16.’

It was during these difficult conditions that Paul and Silas were sent away by night to Berea, some sixty miles away.

IN BEREIA

“As soon as it was night, the brothers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. Many of the Jews believed, as did also several prominent Greek women and many Greek men. When the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea, they went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up. The brothers immediately sent Paul to the coast, but Silas and Timothy stayed at Berea. The men who escorted Paul brought him to Athens and then left with instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible”. Acts 17:10-15

BEREIA

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘This relatively unimportant place has given its name to Bible classes all over the world. This city is ‘the modern Verria’ and was probably founded in the fifth century B.C. In Paul’s day, it was a prosperous centre with a significant centre with a significant Jewish population and a synagogue. It was the home of Sopater, Acts 20:4.’

The believers in Thessalonica sent Paul and Silas to Berea during the night, Acts 9:25 / Matthew 10:23. Luke tells us that Paul and Silas, when they arrived at Berea, immediately entered the synagogue to teach, Romans 1:16.

However, rather than base their decisions on the traditional teachings of man, the Bereans carefully examined the Word of God to determine the truthfulness of the teachings they heard, Acts 17:10-11 / James 1:22-25.

The result was that many Jews believed the gospel along with honourable Greek women and not a few men, Acts 17:12. When it comes to preaching the Word of God, those who believe humbly accept the message, but those who don’t are filled with jealousy, Acts 5:17 / Acts 13:45.

And here again, Luke reports that these jealous people stirred more jealousy among the unbelieving Jews of Thessalonica who journeyed to Berea and stirred up the multitudes, Acts 17:13. Once more, we see those who oppose the truth, stirring up trouble, Acts 13:45 / Acts 13:50 / Acts 14:2 / Acts 14:5 / Acts 14:19 / Acts 17:5-8. Walker, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The hounds of persecution bayed on Paul’s trail from Thessalonica to Berea.’

Whenever the apostles have any success and a multitude of people begin to listen to them, the unbelievers are filled with jealousy. They are so afraid that they will no longer be popular within the community. They are afraid that the apostles will take these believers away from them and their traditions.

Jealousy is one of those sins that prevent a person from inheriting the kingdom of God, Galatians 5:19-21. Jealousy is one of those sins which should have been put off at our baptism, Romans 13:13-14.

Luke tells us that with the trouble coming from these jealous trouble makers, some of the brethren escorted Paul safely to the sea while Silas and Timothy continued at Berea, Acts 17:14. Then the brethren journeyed on to Athens with Paul and were asked by the apostle to send Silas and Timothy as soon as possible, Acts 17:15.

Longenecker, in his commentary, says the following concerning what was happening during this time.

‘Timothy was sent back to Thessalonica, 1 Thessalonians 3:2. Silas, however, seems to have gone back to Macedonia, Acts 18:5, probably to Philippi, where he received from the young congregation there a gift of money for the support of the missionaries, Philippians 4:15. In the meantime, Paul had moved from Athens to Corinth, Acts 18:1, and was joined there by Silas and Timothy on their return from Macedonia, Acts 18:5 / 1 Thessalonians 3:6.’

What Luke records next is one of the greatest debates we find in the New Testament with the so-called wise men of Athens, Ecclesiastes 7:11-12.

IN ATHENS

“While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to dispute with him. Some of them asked, “What is this babbler trying to say?” Others remarked, “He seems to be advocating foreign gods.” They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we want to know what they mean.” (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.)” Acts 17:16-21

ATHENS

Easton’s Bible dictionary says the following.

‘Athens was the capital of Attica, the most celebrated city of the ancient world, the seat of Greek literature and art during the golden period of Grecian history. Its inhabitants were fond of novelty, Acts 17:21, and were remarkable for their zeal in the worship of the gods. It was a sarcastic saying of the Roman satirist that it was ‘easier to find a god at Athens than a man.’

While Paul waited for the others to arrive in Athens, Paul apparently toured the city and discovered it was totally given over to idolatry, [Acts 17:16](#). This distressed, or one might say angered him, and so, he went to the synagogue to reason with the Jews and devout Greeks of the city, [Acts 17:17](#) / [1 Corinthians 1:21](#).

Because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection with those he met in the marketplace, and this drew the attention of certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers, some of whom decided they wanted to hear what the ‘babbler’ had to say. Others in the crowd thought he was talking about foreign gods, [Acts 17:17-18](#).

Luke tells us that they took hold of Paul in a non-threatening way and brought him to the Areopagus, or Mars Hill, to present his new philosophy, [Acts 17:19](#). This is interesting because Mars was the mythical god of war, and the legend goes that Mars, the god of war, was on Mars Hill for the murder of one of Neptune’s sons; that’s why it was called Mars Hill.

And interestingly, a messenger for the true Prince of Peace was placed in that spot so that curious philosophers might hear something new. To his audience, what Paul was teaching were strange ideas, but at least they wanted to try and understand what he meant, [Acts 17:20](#).

Luke takes the time to insert that ‘all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas’, [Acts 17:21](#).

Sometimes, when we’re trying to share the Gospel with people, they too find it strange. Didn’t we find it strange when we first heard the Gospel? When someone came along and said, ‘hey you need help? You need Jesus in your life!’

No wonder people think that Christians are strange, no wonder people can’t understand why we come to worship every week to remember a guy who died and was raised back to life.

When we say these things to people, we are going to get a mixed reaction; some will say that sounds wise, and others will say that’s stupid. And that’s what we see happening next here: we see a mixed reaction to Paul’s wisdom.

“Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: “Men of Athens! I see that in every way, you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you. “The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else.” Acts 17:22-25

Notice how Paul began his sermon; he began by noting that they were very religious, the KJV uses the words, ‘very superstitious’. They worship idols devoted to all types of gods, even an unknown God, [Acts 17:22-23](#) / [Romans 2:14-16](#).

Alexander Campbell says the following.

‘They had gone beyond their contemporaries in erecting an altar to ‘the unknown God.’ No other people or city had thus confessed their ignorance and their devotion. It was a grand conception to erect an altar to the GREAT UNKNOWN in the centre of Greek civilisation.’

This is where most of us would make a mess of it. We tend to think that because people don’t believe what the Bible teaches, because people don’t worship as the Bible instructs us to, we tend to think they are not religious, when in fact they are.

Cornelius was a religious man in every sense of the word, but he wasn’t saved at that point in time, [Acts 10:1-2](#). In other words, people can be religious but not saved. Notice also that Paul didn’t go in there all guns firing; he went in with a spirit of gentleness and respect, [1 Corinthians 9:22](#) / [1 Peter 3:15-16](#).

Morgan, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Paul really began with the note of conciliation, and from beginning to end there was nothing calculated to offend, or drive away the men whom he desired to gain.’

Paul seized upon their recognition of their own potentially limited knowledge and began to tell them about the true God. He tells them that rather than there being a series of gods, each over some small element of the universe, there is one God who created and rules overall, [Acts 17:24](#) / [Acts 7:48-50](#).

He says the Creator is not confined to some building made by men, [Acts 7:48](#), nor did He need men’s worship, [Acts 17:24](#). In fact, Paul stated that all beings and all things are sustained by His power.

Stott, in his commentary, says the following.

‘This view of the world is very different from either the Epicurean emphasis on a chance combination of atoms or the virtual pantheism of the Stoics.’

Human beings have a built-in urge to worship, and if we know anything from history and today’s society, it is this: if people do not worship God, they will worship something else. It could be the sun, a tree, money, or self; there are literally no limits to whom or what people choose to worship.

When Paul writes to the church in Rome, he says that the Creator made his existence known in the wonderful, obviously designed elements of the universe and that those who reject that evidence are without excuse, [Romans 1:20](#).

And then he goes on to say that lots of people have refused to glorify God and become vain in their reasoning, with their ‘senseless’ hearts being darkened, [Romans 1:21-25](#). He says it so bad that they even exchange the worship of the Creator for that of various ‘creatures’, such as men, birds, beasts, and even creeping things.

So Paul tells them that there are not a lot of different little gods who represent every little thing in the universe, [Isaiah 44:12-17](#), but there is one God who created all things and rules over all things.

“From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. ‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’

As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’ “Therefore, since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by man’s design and skill”. Acts 17:26-29

Paul goes on and tells them that the God of heaven had made all the various nationalities, [Genesis 3:20](#), and He worked within them in precisely the way and at precisely the time He planned, [Acts 17:26](#).

He says to these Gentiles that this divinely controlled flow of history was used by God to encourage men to seek him, [Acts 17:27](#) / [John 6:44](#) / [John 12:32](#). Yet, the supreme God is always near since we live in him, move in him and depend upon him for our very existence, [Acts 17:27](#).

Paul, being the educated man that he was, noted that one of their own poets said men are God’s offspring, so God cannot be stone but must be alive just as his children are alive, [Acts 17:28](#) / [Titus 1:12](#). The words, ‘we are his offspring,’ are from the Cilician Stoic philosopher Aratus.

He tells them that we are God’s offspring, but shouldn’t think that God is made of gold or silver or a stone image made by man, [Acts 17:29](#). And it’s now that Paul gets to the point.

“In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.” When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, “We want to hear you again on this subject.” At that, Paul left the Council. A few men became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others”. Acts 17:30-34

Paul boldly stated that God would no longer overlook the ignorant worship of men, but now God demands that they turn from their ignorance and serve him, [Acts 17:30](#) / [Acts 14:16-18](#).

This is what we would call repentance, [2 Corinthians 7:10](#). Paul didn't mix his words here, and we should never leave repentance out of the Gospel, [Luke 13:3](#) / [Acts 2:38](#).

True repentance means more than just feeling sorry for what you have done or said. It's a turning, a refusal to go back to the ways of the world. It's a conscious decision to start following God and His ways, [2 Corinthians 7:8-10](#).

Cocoris, in his commentary, says the following.

'The Bible requires repentance for salvation, but repentance does not mean to turn from sin, nor a change in one's conduct. Those are the fruits of repentance. Biblical repentance is a change of mind or attitude concerning either God, [Acts 20:21](#), Christ, [Acts 2:38](#), dead works, [Hebrews 6:1](#), or sin, [Acts 8:22](#). When one trusts Christ, it is inconceivable that he would not automatically change his mind concerning one or more or even all of these things.' Paul calls for repentance from these Gentiles in Athens, and he saw such repentance as especially important. Why? Because a day of judgment had been set aside by the Divine Planner, [Acts 17:31](#) / [Psalms 96:13](#) / [John 5:22](#) / [John 5:27](#) / [Daniel 7:13](#).

Make no mistake about it, Judgement Day is set and coming, and on that day, the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ will rightly judge all men, [Hebrews 9:27](#) / [Matthew 12:41-42](#) / [Matthew 25:30](#) / [John 5:22](#) / [John 5:25-29](#), which is a truth which is confirmed by His resurrection from the dead, [2 Peter 3:3-14](#).

Because we don't know when the Day of Judgement is going to come, there is a sense of urgency about the message. Oh, I'm sure that when we share that message with people, some like Paul's listeners will mock our words, [1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5](#), but I'm also sure, like some of Paul's listeners, there will be those who will want to hear more, [Acts 17:32](#).

But one thing I know for certain, as long as we keep sharing that message with others, a few people like Paul's listeners after he left the Council, will actually be moved to obey the Gospel, [Acts 17:33-34](#). Luke tells us that among those who believed were a man named Dionysius, who was a member of the Areopagus, and a woman named Damaris, [Acts 17:34](#).

Dummelow, in his commentary, says the following concerning Dionysius.

'He was a member of the court of the Areopagus. As all members of the Areopagus had passed through the office of Archon, Dionysius must have been of high social position.'

Morgan, in his commentary, says the following.

'In the next century that Church at Athens gave to the Christian church Publius, Quadratus, Aristides, Athenagoras, and others, bishops, and martyrs; and in the third century, the church there was peaceable and pure. In the fourth century, the Christian schools of Athens gave to the Christian Church Basil and Gregory.'

Some commentators believe that Paul missed a huge opportunity here because he never once mentioned the Name Jesus in his speech. However, he did preach the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus.

Harrison, in his commentary, says the following.

'It has often been maintained that in Athens Paul attempted the intellectual approach and tried to be a philosopher among the philosophers, rather than preaching the simple gospel of Jesus Christ; but this is not a valid criticism.'

CHAPTER 18

INTRODUCTION

“After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. “There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them”. Acts 18:1-3

IN CORINTH

In the previous chapter, we left the apostle Paul boldly preaching in Christ’s Name to the so-called wise men of Athens. And as usual, we found those who were convinced and believed that God was the creator of all things, and we also found those who weren’t convinced and didn’t believe.

Luke didn’t explain why Paul left Athens or how he journeyed to Corinth. Maybe Paul had grown weary of the so-called intellectuals of Athens who continually wanted to hear more but refused to obey.

But the journey of some forty miles could have been made in two days on foot or one day if one sailed, but whichever route they took, the final destination was the city of Corinth, Acts 18:1.

CORINTH

When we think of the city of Corinth, honesty is not the word that most people would use. Corinth was the capital and chief city of Achaia, which is in the area we would now call Greece.

And Corinth became such an important city because of its location just one and a half miles south of the Isthmus of Corinth. It was able to control that four-mile-wide neck of land.

The city also commanded the eastern port of that peninsula, Cenchreae, Acts 18:18, and so to save time and avoid the one hundred and fifty miles of dangerous waters around the tip of Greece, ships would unload their goods on one side of the peninsula and have them carried to the other side. Some smaller ships were even pulled across and placed in the water on the other side. Therefore, Corinth was a trading centre by land and sea.

But it was also strategic, militarily speaking. The Roman minority in Corinth was a strong force in the population, as this was one of the colonies established by Julius Caesar.

The commercial prospects caused a large group of Jews to settle in the city, but Greeks also played a great role. Because of the seaport and commerce, many other nationalities mixed with the above-mentioned major groups. But if Corinth was well known for anything, it was well known for its corruption.

Charles Pfeiffer, in Baker’s Bible Atlas, writes the following.

‘Greeks, Romans, Jews and adventurers from the entire Mediterranean world came to Corinth for trade and vice in all its forms. ‘To live like a Corinthian’ became synonymous with a life of luxury and licentiousness.’

The immoral nature of the city was added to by the temple of Aphrodite, goddess of love, which was located in Corinth. A thousand priestesses of the goddess served as prostitutes who were available for the free use of temple

visitors. So that's the background to the city of Corinth, and I think that's important for us to understand because it helps us understand what Paul is about to face.

Morgan, in his commentary, says the following.

‘It is significant that it was from this city that Paul wrote his Roman letter; and when one reads his description of Gentile corruption in that Roman letter, one has almost certainly a mirror of what he found in Corinth, Romans 1:22-32.’

Constable, in his commentary, gives the following useful timeline.

‘Silas and Timothy had evidently re-joined Paul in Athens, 1 Thessalonians 3:1. Before leaving Athens, Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica, 1 Thessalonians 3:2, and Silas back to somewhere in Macedonia, Acts 18:5, perhaps Philippi, Philippians 4:16. Paul entered Corinth without these brethren, but they joined him in Corinth later, Acts 18:5 / 1 Thessalonians 3:6.’

In Corinth, Paul found two Jews, Aquila, who was from Pontus, which was a province between Bithynia and Armenia, and his wife Priscilla, Acts 18:2, who was also known as Prisca, 2 Timothy 4:19 / Romans 16:3-4. Luke reports they, and all other Jews, were driven out of Rome by Emperor Claudius, which one commentator suggests was around AD 49, Acts 18:2.

We can only imagine Paul arriving in Corinth, alone and with little or nothing to eat, but like all good Jews, Paul had been taught a trade, tent making, and immediately found two Jews, Aquila and Priscilla, who had the same occupation, with whom he could live and work, Acts 18:2-3 / 1 Corinthians 16:19.

We should note that Paul certainly had the right to receive some support from the churches, 1 Corinthians 9:7-14. However, there were times he supported himself through tent-making because he didn't want people to accuse him of profiting from preaching the Gospel, 1 Corinthians 9:15-18.

Bruce, in his commentary, says the following.

‘In Judaism, it was not considered proper for a scribe or a rabbi to receive payment for his teaching, so many of them practised a trade in addition to their study and teaching of the law.’

Whether his fellow leatherworkers were Christians as of yet is not known, and I say leather workers because tent-making included any type of leatherwork in Paul's day. Paul's later writings do make it clear that these two became special friends and allies of the apostle as he preached the Gospel of peace, Romans 16:3.

Whatever God asks us to do, wherever God asks us to go, we need to have the same mindset as Paul when he looked at Corinth and thought to himself, ‘I am afraid of this place, I am afraid of these people but I will go and trust God,’ 1 Corinthians 2:3. ‘After all, what can mortal man do to me?’ Psalms 118:6.

God understands fear, and He will help us and protect us when we trust Him, but when God takes us to frightening places or situations, we need to trust that God will give us anything we need for His purpose, Psalms 23:1-4. God has set the stage for the next part of Paul's journey and the preaching in Corinth.

“Every Sabbath, he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. But when the Jews opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am clear of my responsibility. From now on, I will go to the Gentiles.” Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized.” Acts 18:4-8

As we have seen time and again, Paul first preached in the synagogue in Corinth, 1 Corinthians 2:1-16, and it was during this time that Silas and Timothy once again joined his company, Acts 18:4.

It appears that Silas may have come from Berea, while Timothy more than likely arrived from Thessalonica, [Acts 18:5](#) / [1 Thessalonians 3:1-2](#) / [1 Thessalonians 3:6-10](#). It is also during this time that the church in Philippi sent Paul some funds to support him in his preaching ministry, [2 Corinthians 11:8-9](#).

It was around the time of their arrival when Paul became fully occupied in telling the Jews that Jesus was the Christ, [Acts 18:5](#). And when the Jews rejected the truth, [Ezekiel 33:1-9](#) / [Luke 7:30](#), and started to abuse Paul verbally, [Acts 18:5](#).

Paul shook out his clothes in protest, [Acts 13:51](#), and told them, ‘Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent of it,’ [Acts 18:6](#). He tells them he will go on to preach to the Gentiles, [Acts 18:6](#) / [Matthew 7:6](#) / [Acts 13:7-11](#) / [Acts 13:46](#) / [Acts 14:2-6](#) / [Acts 17:5](#) / [Acts 19:8-9](#) / [Acts 28:23-28](#) / [Romans 1:16](#).

And so off he went to the house of Justus, which was next door to the synagogue where Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed and was baptised by the apostle’s own hands, [Acts 18:7-8](#) / [1 Corinthians 1:14](#).

But it wasn’t only Crispus who believed and was baptised; those in Crispus’ family and many other Corinthians also believed and were baptised, [Acts 18:8](#) / [Matthew 28:19-20](#) / [1 Corinthians 1:26](#).

I can’t for the life of me work out how anyone can study the Book of Acts and not understand the importance of baptism. It’s all over the book; we can’t miss it unless, of course, we don’t understand its importance.

“One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: “Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.” So Paul stayed for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.” [Acts 18:9-11](#)

Have you ever been to a place that just frightens you? Corinth was a place just like that. Corinth must have been a frightening place to go, even for Paul, [1 Corinthians 2:3](#). The apostle Paul, as great as he was, was not without his periods of despondency.

In the Greek New Testament, it literally reads, ‘stop being afraid’, [1 Corinthians 2:3](#). The implication clearly is that Paul was struggling with his spirit at this time, and the Saviour came to his aid, [Psalm 56:4](#).

Hughes, in his commentary, says the following.

‘There had been culture shock in Athens, and now Paul experienced moral shock in Corinth. Its sweat and perfume and grit smothered Paul’s righteous soul, and he became depressed.’

Fear is a very real feeling, but God does understand. He understands when we are frightened, and He certainly understood when the apostle Paul was afraid in Corinth. In fact, God was so aware of Paul’s fear that He spoke to him through a vision.

Luke says that God was aware of Paul’s fear and so He reassured him, in a vision, and encouraged him to continue preaching in Corinth, [Acts 18:9](#) / [Psalm 27:1](#) / [Hebrews 13:5](#) / [2 Timothy 1:12](#).

He promised that Paul would not be harmed and assured him that there were many more who would obey the Gospel, [Acts 18:10](#) / [Isaiah 57:13](#) / [Philippians 4:19](#) / [2 Timothy 1:7](#).

Paul trusted God to help him overcome that fear during his time in Corinth. And so, with the promise from God, Paul continued preaching in Corinth, [Acts 18:11](#), probably staying at Priscilla and Aquilla’s house, [1 Corinthians 16:19](#), but as we are about to read, his trials are far from over.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Paul’s year and a half stay in Corinth probably dates from the fall of 50 to the spring of A.D. 52.’

“While Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him to the place of judgment.” This man,” they charged, “is persuading the people to worship God in ways contrary to the law.” Just as Paul was about to speak, Gallio said to the Jews, “If you Jews were making a complaint about some misdemeanour or serious crime, it would be reasonable for me to listen to you. But since it involves questions about words and names,

and your own law, settle the matter yourselves. I will not be a judge of such things.” So he had them ejected from the court. Then they all turned on Sosthenes, the synagogue ruler and beat him in front of the court. But Gallio showed no concern whatever. Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time. Then he left the brothers and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. Before he sailed, he had his hair cut off at Cenchrea because of a vow he had taken.” Acts 18:12-18

Luke tells us that the Jews brought Paul to the judgment seat, 2 Corinthians 5:10 / Matthew 27:19, before Gallio, when he was proconsul of Achaia, Acts 18:12. They accused Paul of preaching contrary to Moses’ law, Acts 18:13, as others had done before, Acts 16:21 / Acts 17:6-7 / Acts 17:13, but Gallio drove them out without trying the case because it did not have anything to do with Roman law, Acts 18:14-16.

Longenecker, in his commentary, says the following.

‘If Gallio had accepted the Jewish charge and found Paul guilty of the alleged offence, provincial governors everywhere would have had a precedent, and Paul’s ministry would have been severely restricted. As it was, Gallio’s refusal to act in the matter was tantamount to the recognition of Christianity as a *religio licita*.’

Some of the Greeks seized Sosthenes, the new ruler of the synagogue, beat him up before Gallio’s judgment seat without the proconsul taking any notice, Acts 18:17. At some point, Sosthenes also became a Christian, 1 Corinthians 1:1.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Gallio’s decision resulted in the official toleration of Christianity that continued in the empire until A.D. 64, when Nero blamed the Christians for burning Rome. It may also have encouraged Paul to appeal to Caesar when he felt the Jews in Palestine were influencing the Palestinian Roman officials against him too much, Acts 25:11.’

Despite all those beatings and difficult times for Paul, he continued to work in Corinth for some time before leaving the brethren and sailing for Syria with Priscilla and Aquila, Acts 18:18. Paul obviously wasn’t afraid anymore because he knew the Lord was with him, Acts 18:9-10.

Luke also tells us that Paul took a vow in Cenchrea, Acts 10:1 / Romans 16:1, and had his hair cut off, Acts 18:18.

Why? It probably relates to a form of what the Bible calls the Nazirite vow, Numbers 6:1-21.

This vow was practised among the early Christians, and we’re going to read about it again in Acts 21 when we get there. But why did Paul take this vow and shave his head? It was offered in gratefulness for deliverance from danger.

Remember that Paul was afraid, terribly afraid, hence why the Lord spoke to him in a vision, Acts 18:9-10. Paul trusted God to be with him, and when God delivered him from all the events of Corinth, Paul was grateful. And he expressed his gratefulness to God by making a vow which consisted of shaving off his hair.

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

‘No doubt Paul was thinking of all God’s goodness to him in Corinth and took this vow to show his gratitude.’

Paul, after showing his gratitude to God, moves away from Corinth, stops at Ephesus and returns to Antioch.

PRISCILLA, AQUILA AND APOLLOS

“They arrived at Ephesus, where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila. He went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. When they asked him to spend more time with them, he declined. But as he left, he promised, “I will come back if it is God’s will.” Then he set sail from Ephesus. When he landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church and then went down to Antioch. After spending some time in Antioch, Paul set out from there and travelled from place to place throughout the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.” Acts 18:19-23

It was around two years ago that Paul wanted to preach in Asia Minor, but was prevented from doing so by the Holy Spirit, [Acts 16:6](#). Now we find him preaching in the very places he wanted to in the first place.

It appears from our text that Paul spent a short time preaching in the synagogue in Ephesus, and he promised to return if it was God's will, and so left Priscilla and Aquila and sailed on to Caesarea, [Acts 18:19-21](#).

When Paul said to the Ephesians, 'if it is God's will, I will return', [Acts 18:21](#), he understood who was directing His life. Too many times, I hear Christians making decisions for themselves in life because that is the way they are determined to go. Too many times, I hear Christians making plans without even considering if this is God's will for them or not.

Every decision, big or small, we make needs to be made with the question, 'Is this God's will?' Because, like Paul, we need to remind ourselves of whom exactly it is that is directing our lives, [Luke 12:16-21](#) / [James 4:13-15](#).

Everything we do as Christians should be directed by the will of God.

He made a quick trip to Jerusalem, [Acts 18:22](#), and then went to Antioch, [Acts 18:22](#), and after some time, he went on to strengthen the churches in Galatia and Phrygia, [Acts 18:23](#).

PAUL'S THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY

From [Acts 18-21](#), we read about Paul's third missionary journey. Paul likely left for his third missionary journey in the spring of 54 A.D. This third missionary journey was probably more than four years long and ended with Paul in Jerusalem in 58 A.D.

Beginning in Antioch, he travelled to Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, Ephesus, Macedonia, Troas, Assos, Mitylene, Miletus, Kos, Rhodes, Patara, Phoenicia, Tyre, Ptolemais, Caesarea, and Jerusalem. Paul is off encouraging the churches elsewhere, but Luke goes on and introduces us to a man named Apollos.

"Meanwhile, a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervour and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue.

When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately. When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. On arriving, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed. For he vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ. "Acts 18:24-28

Luke tells us that at Ephesus, an Alexandrian Jew named Apollos, who was an eloquent speaker, began to preach about Jesus. Apollos was knowledgeable in the scriptures and very accurate in his teachings about Jesus, [Acts 18:24-25](#). But notice Luke says that Apollos only knew about John's baptism, [Acts 18:25](#) / [Acts 19:1-5](#).

Boice, in his commentary, says the following.

'Apollos was a well-educated and also a well-travelled man. We can imagine that in his youth he had gone to Jerusalem, especially if he had an interest in the Old Testament, and while there had come under the influence of the preaching of John the Baptist.'

Apollos began to boldly preach in the synagogue, [Acts 18:26](#). Apparently, Priscilla and Aquila, [Acts 18:3](#) / [Acts 18:18-22](#), heard him there and recognised his inadequate understanding of baptism, so they took him aside privately to more fully instruct him in the ways of the Lord, [Acts 18:26](#) / [Acts 19:1-5](#).

Harrison, in his commentary, says the following.

'Quite likely, Apollos was now baptised by Aquila in the name of Christ.'

Apollos then decided to go into Achaia, and the brethren wrote him a letter of recommendation, [Acts 18:27](#). And it was in Achaia that he was able to give great assistance to the brethren through using powerful arguments from God's word to show Jesus was the Christ, [Acts 18:27-28](#) / [Acts 18:24-25](#) / [Ephesians 2:8-9](#).

APOLLOS

It appears that some of the Christians in Corinth started to follow Apollos, [1 Corinthians 1:12](#) / [1 Corinthians 3:4](#), but I doubt if he himself encouraged this because Paul saw him as someone he could trust, [1 Corinthians 3:5-7](#) / [1 Corinthians 16:12](#).

Apollos serves as a good example of a preacher and teacher of the Word of God who means well and is very sincere, but was wrong. When Apollos travelled to Ephesus and began speaking 'boldly in the synagogue', Aquila and Priscilla heard him and realised that he still was advocating the baptism of John the Baptist as it looked forward to the coming of Christ, [Acts 18:25-26](#).

Obviously, Aquila and Priscilla knew that John's baptism was no longer valid because it had been supplanted by the baptism commemorating Christ's death and burial.

Apollos was sincere, but he was sincerely wrong. That's why Aquila and Priscilla 'invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately', [Acts 18:26](#).

And when his error was pointed out, he corrected it and subsequently continued with his preaching and teaching about Christ, apparently with much success, since, upon his arrival in Achaia, [Acts 18:27](#).

In other words, Apollos was a good teacher, but nevertheless, he taught error. When he was shown his mistake, he possessed an attitude of humility and a love for the Truth that caused him to make the necessary correction.

That's a wonderful example for all who would be teachers of God's Word. Does the fact that he taught an error necessarily make him a false teacher? No, I don't believe it does. Apollos wasn't a false teacher because when he learned of his mistake, he changed his teachings accordingly.

Although the text doesn't tell us about his baptism 'into Christ', [Matthew 28:19-20](#) / [Romans 6:1-3](#), we know it must have happened because Luke tells us about another group of people in Ephesus who had only received John's baptism in the very next chapter, [Acts 19:1-5](#).

CHAPTER 19

INTRODUCTION

"While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?" "John's baptism," they replied. Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." Acts 19:1-4

EPHESUS

Ephesus was a large and important city on the west coast of Asia Minor, where the apostle Paul founded a church. And there were a number of factors which contributed to the importance of Ephesus. The first factor was economics, Ephesus was the most favourable seaport in the province of Asia and the most important trade centre west of Tarsus.

Another factor was size; Ephesus was the largest city in the province, having a population of perhaps three hundred thousand people. A third factor was culture; Ephesus contained a theatre that seated an estimated twenty-five thousand people.

The fourth, and perhaps most significant, reason for the importance of Ephesus was religion. The Temple of Artemis or Diana, at Ephesus, ranked as one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.

If you were around in Biblical times and thought of Ephesus, your mind would automatically think about the city where you would find the ‘temple of Diana.’

In **Acts 19**, we find in Ephesus, a silversmith by the name of Demetrius who made a living out of idol making, and he was causing all sorts of trouble for Paul and the other disciples.

And we have recorded in **Acts 19:27** that Diana was loved and worshipped by people from all over the world. The original temple of Diana crumbled into dust many centuries ago, but when it was rebuilt, it became one of the Seven Wonders of the World.

And it was to this temple that Alexander the Great came too. He wanted his name carved on one of the one hundred and twenty-seven pillars, and so he offered all the riches of his eastern campaign for the privilege, but the city fathers turned down the offer.

And so even the mightiest mortal on earth of the time couldn’t even buy the privilege to have his name on a pillar in the temple of a god. No wonder years later the apostle Paul would write to the Ephesian church and tell them in **Ephesians 2:19-22**, that they were the temple, not of any old god but of Almighty God Himself.

The history of Christianity at Ephesus began around A.D. 50, perhaps as a result of the efforts of Priscilla and Aquila, as we read in **Acts 18:18**. Paul came to Ephesus in about A.D. 52, establishing the church and staying there for at least three years, as **Acts 20:31** tells us. Paul wrote the letters of 1 and 2 Corinthians during his stay in the city of Ephesus at this time

PAUL IN EPHESUS

When it comes to the Holy Spirit and identifying if a person possesses Him or not, apart from the fruit of the Spirit, **Galatians 5:22-23**, there is no physical way of knowing. And so, what Luke records here is Paul asking that very question, do you possess the Holy Spirit?

Luke tells us that while Apollo was in Corinth, Paul went to Ephesus, **Acts 18:21**, where he met a group of disciples and asked them if they had received the Holy Spirit, **Acts 19:1-2**.

Remember, Apollos knew a lot about the Scriptures; he taught about Jesus, but he hadn’t been taught about this new baptism for the forgiveness of sins. And so Priscilla and Aquila took him to their home and taught him the way of the Lord more clearly, **Acts 18:24-26**.

Here in Ephesus, we find some people who had been taught by Apollos prior to the time he had been taught the way of the Lord more perfectly. Luke calls them ‘disciples of Christ’, **Acts 19:1**, simply because Apollos ‘taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John,’ **Acts 18:25**.

Kent, in his commentary, says the following.

‘It is difficult to determine whether the ‘disciples’ whom Paul found in Ephesus were Christians or not. They seem quite similar to Apollos, **Acts 18:25-26**, and some students of Acts believe they were either Old Testament saints or untaught Christians.’

Paul asked them if they had received the Holy Spirit, and they answered by saying they did not even know there was a Holy Spirit, **Acts 19:2**.

Spurgeon, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Give a man an electric shock, and I warrant you he will know it; but if he has the Holy Ghost, he will know it much more.’

Hervey, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Nothing can mark more strongly the connection between baptism and the reception of the Holy Spirit than this question does. For it implies, how could you be ignorant of the giving of the Holy Spirit if you were duly baptised?’

A failure to know anything about the Holy Spirit whatsoever would truly point out a flaw in the instructions they had received. Paul goes ahead and asks another question, ‘what baptism did they receive?’ **Acts 19:3**. The KJV says, ‘into what then were you baptised?’ and they replied John’s baptism, **Acts 19:3**.

Paul had to ask that question because they had been baptised in John’s baptism, which would have presented a problem when that baptism was valid ‘prior’ to the death of the Lord.

John told people to repent, be baptised, and believe in Christ, who would follow him, **Acts 19:4** / **Acts 1:5** / **Acts 11:16** / **Acts 13:25** / **Acts 18:25**, and as we all know, Jesus did come, died, was buried, and then resurrected.

But before He ascended back to heaven, He clearly commanded everyone to believe and be baptised, **Matthew 28:19-20** / **Mark 16:16-17**. And in **Acts 2**, we see people being obedient to those commands, **Acts 2:38**.

In other words, for those who would be Christians, belief in Jesus would come ‘before’ they have repented and been baptised under the authority of His name for the remission of sins.

I know of some groups who only baptise in Jesus’ Name and not in ‘the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit’ as Jesus commanded, **Matthew 28:19**; however, when we look at the footnote for that verse, we discover the word ‘into’.

In other words, we are baptised in the Name of Jesus, that is, by His authority, but we are baptised into the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, that is, we are baptised into a relationship with the Godhead, **Romans 6:1-3**.

There are not many baptisms for a person to receive to be saved; the Bible only knows of one, **Ephesians 4:4-6**.

People need to ask themselves if their baptism is the one baptism which Paul speaks of here. Because if it’s not, they need to do what these people did next.

“On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. There were about twelve men in all.” **Acts 19:5-7**

Luke tells us that these disciples were re-baptised under the authority of Christ, **Acts 19:5** / **Mark 16:16**. They would have received the forgiveness of their sins and the gift of the indwelling Spirit at this point, **Acts 2:38** / **Romans 8:9** / **1 Corinthians 12:13**.

True baptism reflects a person's understanding that this ordinance pictures the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Romans 6:3-4 / Colossians 2:12. In other words, the sinner is buried in and raised from the water, just as the Lord was buried and then raised from the dead.

If a person has submitted to baptism for some purpose other than that which is supplied in the Bible, then in reality, they have not obeyed the Lord. Baptism is never defined as 'an outward sign of an inward grace' as some like to say.

Baptism is not a mere representation of redemption for those already received. The purpose of baptism is for the forgiveness of sins, Acts 2:38, or as Luke tells us 'to have sins washed away', Acts 22:16.

Baptism, according to Romans 6:3-4, and Galatians 3:26-27, places a person 'into Christ' or His 'body,' 1 Corinthians 12:13. And it is at this point that a person is saved according to Mark 16:16 / 1 Peter 3:21.

The apostle Paul then laid his hands on the twelve of them, and they received miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit, which enabled them to speak in languages they had never studied, and they prophesied, that is, they proclaimed God's will, Acts 19:6-7.

Although they would have received the 'gift' of the Holy Spirit at their baptism and the indwelling gift of the Holy Spirit, Acts 2:38, here they received the 'gifts' of the Holy Spirit.

Marshall, in his commentary, says the following.

'It is safe to say that the New Testament does not recognise the possibility of being a Christian apart from possession of the Spirit, John 3:5 / Acts 11:17 / Romans 8:9 / 1 Corinthians 12:3 / Galatians 3:2 / 1 Thessalonians 1:5 / Titus 3:5 / Hebrews 6:4 / 1 Peter 1:2 / 1 John 3:24 / 1 John 4:13.'

As we have seen time and time again throughout the Book of Acts, these twelve men could only speak in tongues, that is, known languages that they had never studied or learned, Acts 19:6 / Acts 2:4 / Acts 10:46 / 1 Corinthians 12:10 / 1 Corinthians 12:28 / 1 Corinthians 12:30 / 1 Corinthians 13:1 / 1 Corinthians 13:8 / 1 Corinthians 14.

They also had the gift of prophecy, which involves speaking forth the Word of God, Acts 19:6 / Acts 21:11 / 1 Corinthians 12:10 / 1 Corinthians 14:3 / 1 Corinthians 13:8-12.

They only had these gifts because Paul, being an apostle, laid his hands on them to bestow the gifts upon them, Acts 6:5-6 / Acts 8:14-17 / 1 Timothy 4:14 / 2 Timothy 1:6. After re-baptising the twelve men and passing on the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, Paul leaves them and goes into a synagogue.

"Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God. But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord." Acts 19:8-10

Luke tells us that Paul entered the synagogue to boldly teach the Jews about the kingdom of God and the Gospel, Acts 19:8 / Acts 1:3 / Acts 1:6 / Acts 8:12 / Acts 14:22 / Acts 20:25 / Acts 28:23 / Acts 28:31.

Remember, Paul had already taught in this synagogue in Ephesus and had been urged to teach further in Acts 18:19-21. But he left for the feast in Jerusalem, and he promised to return and teach some more if it was God's will, Acts 18:21. And so what we see here is that it was God's will for him to return and teach some more.

On this occasion, he reasoned with them for three months and persuaded them about matters concerning the kingdom of God, Acts 19:8. And as usual, we have those who will listen and those who won't, Acts 19:8 / Romans 1:25.

It's all about free will; God is not going to make a person believe. People need to realise that our Lord never destroys the will, but sweetly inclines us, and makes us willing in the day of His power, Revelation 22:17. It's not that God is not willing to save us; it's because people are not willing to come to Him to accept that salvation, Matthew 23:37 / John 5:40.

These Jews whom Paul is preaching to are the very same. Some of them became hard-hearted and chose against the Way of salvation, and so Paul withdrew with the disciples to continue teaching in the school of Tyrannus, Acts 19:9.

And that is where he continued to instruct anyone who would listen over the space of some two years, Acts 19:10 / Ephesians 4:11-12.

What some do at a Bible school is very similar to what Paul was doing because the effects of Paul's teaching radiated out throughout all of Asia, Acts 19:10 / 1 Corinthians 16:8-9.

Paul, who had previously been forbidden to preach in Asia, Acts 16:6, now got to see much fruit born for God in that region. In fact, many believe his teaching helped to establish the seven churches to whom Christ wrote, Revelation 2-3.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘As a result of this three years of work, the local Christians preached the gospel and established churches all over the province of Asia. Among these were the churches of Colosse, Laodicea, and Hierapolis in the Lycus Valley, Colossians 4:13, though evidently Paul did not personally plant them, Colossians 2:1 / Colossians 4:13. Perhaps the other churches mentioned in Revelation 2, 3 (i.e., Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, and Philadelphia) got their start at this time too.’

Even though Paul was a great preacher of the word of God, He always remembered whose Name holds the power, the Name of Jesus. And what Luke records next is a powerful lesson that we must never forget.

“God did extraordinary miracles through Paul so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured, and the evil spirits left them. Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, “In the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out.” Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. [One day] the evil spirit answered them, “Jesus, I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?” Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding.” Acts 19:11-16

Luke says that God caused some great miracles to be worked through Paul. Even to the point where pieces of cloth, like a handkerchief or apron, which had touched his body, could be placed on the body of the sick and diseases or evil spirits went out, Acts 19:11-12 / Matthew 14:36 / Acts 5:15.

Bruce, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The pieces of material were presumably those which Paul used in his tentmaking or leather-working, the sweat-rags for tying around his head and the aprons for tying around his waist.’

Luke says that there were some wandering Jewish exorcists, who apparently had previously been unsuccessful in casting out demons, who tried to capitalise on the power of God they had seen at work through Paul. Particularly, the seven sons of Sceva who attempted to cast out an evil spirit by calling on the name of Jesus, whom Paul preached, Acts 19:13-14.

Bruce, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Sceva may have been a chief priest or the head of a priestly family, Acts 5:24, or he may have only claimed to be one.’

Morgan, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The atmosphere of the city was electric with sorcery and incantations, with exorcists, with all kinds of magical impostors.’

This was Paul's third contact with demonic powers that Luke recorded, Acts 13:6-12 / Acts 16:16-18. The spirit recognised both Jesus and Paul and asked, ‘Who are you?’ And then the spirit caused the possessed man to leap on, overpower and strip them so that they ran away wounded and naked, Acts 19:15-16.

Bruce, in his commentary, says the following.

‘They employed the name of Jesus in an attempt to imitate Paul’s exorcism; but when they tried to use it, like an unfamiliar weapon wrongly handled, it exploded in their hands.’

That’s a powerful lesson we can learn right here: our name cannot save anyone, our name doesn’t frighten people or demons. But make no mistake about it, all hell is terribly afraid of Jesus’ Name, and that’s because our name hasn’t been exalted; Jesus’ Name has.

Our name isn’t above all other names; Jesus’ Name is. People are not going to bow down when they see us, but they will bow down to Jesus. People are not going to confess our name before the Father, but they will confess Jesus’ Name before Him, **Philippians 2:9-11**.

There is another important point we need to raise here. The use of Jesus’ Name in our prayers and our words is not some magic formula that God acts upon. It’s not the ‘name’ of Jesus that works mechanically over the powers; the name is not the ‘key’ of some sort.

It is not because we know His Name but because we know Him and, more importantly, we are known by Him, **John 10:27**. Many people only know the Name of Jesus; they don’t know Jesus as a person, **Matthew 7:22-23**. All they are interested in is the power and not the relationship.

Everyone, both present and past, will have to conclude that there really is only One King and His Name is Jesus. He’s the One who is ruler over all. He’s the one who possesses authority overall.

Even the evil spirit knew this, and they only feared the Name of Jesus. And so after asking, ‘Who are you?’ The evil spirit beat up some Jewish men who were trying to misuse the power of Christ, **Acts 19:16**.

“When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honour. Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds. A number who had practised sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas. In this way, the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power. After all this had happened, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia. “After I have been there,” he said, “I must visit Rome also.” He sent two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia, while he stayed in the province of Asia a little longer.” **Acts 19:17-22**

Luke tells us that since an irreverent use of the name of Jesus brought on this attack by the evil spirit, both Jews and Greeks dwelling in Ephesus were moved to reverent awe for the authority of Jesus, **Acts 19:17**.

When we see Jesus in His proper light, we can’t help but be in awe, in awe of His holiness and His righteousness. When we see Jesus like that, then we are going to bow down and recognise His authority.

Notice what they did when they submitted to Christ, they repented and their repentance is very visible in the fact that many Christians, along with others who submitted to the authority of Christ, confessed their previous evil deeds, **1 Corinthians 6:9-11**, and involvement in the magical arts, **Acts 19:18 / Ephesians 4:31 / Colossians 3:7-8 / 1 Peter 2:1 / 1 John 1:9**.

Their repentance was further illustrated in the fact that books costing some fifty thousand pieces of silver were publicly thrown into a pile and burned, **Acts 19:19**. And so from that point forward, the Gospel grew in a great way and conquered the hearts of many in the region, **Acts 19:20**.

It was at the end of this great period of growth that Luke tells us that Paul mapped out plans to go through Macedonia and Achaia on the way to Jerusalem, **Acts 19:21**.

Paul eventually wants to go to Rome, **Acts 19:21 / Romans 1:8-15 / Romans 15:25-31 / 1 Corinthians 16:1-4**, and so he sent Timothy, **Acts 17:16-17 / 1 Corinthians 4:17**, and Erastus, **2 Timothy 4:20**, on to Macedonia, **Acts 18:5 / 1 Corinthians 4:17 / 1 Corinthians 16:10-11**, while he personally stayed in Asia, **Acts 19:22**.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Paul wanted to collect money for the poor Judean saints from the more prosperous Christians in the Aegean region and then deliver it to them in Jerusalem, Acts 24:17 / 1 Corinthians 16:1-4. He realised that returning to Jerusalem would be dangerous for him, Romans 15:30-32, but he determined to go nonetheless. Paul never let the possibility of danger to his person turn him away from doing God’s will.’

Luke continues his report to Theophilus, and he tells us that while all that confessing and repentance is taking place, while the church is growing, he goes on to tell us about a riot in the city of Ephesus.

THE RIOT IN EPHEBUS

“About that time, there arose a great disturbance about the Way. A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in no little business for the craftsmen. He called them together, along with the workmen in related trades, and said: “Men, you know we receive a good income from this business. And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that man-made gods are no gods at all. There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited, and the goddess herself, who is worshipped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty. When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting: “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” Acts 19:23-27

Luke tells us that while Timothy and Erastus were away, a man named Demetrius, a silversmith who made shrines of Diana, or Artemis, began to stir people up against the Way, Acts 19:23 / Acts 19:9 / Acts 9:2 / Acts 16:17 / Acts 18:25-26 / Acts 22:4 / Acts 24:14 / Acts 24:22.

He called together the other members of his craft, reminding them that their wealth came from making silver idols, Acts 19:24-25. He truthfully reported that Paul’s preaching had impacted people in Ephesus and throughout Asia, Acts 19:26.

He said that Paul had declared idols made with hands were not gods, Acts 19:26, to the point of destroying their business and causing Diana to fall into disrepute, Acts 19:27.

Longenecker, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The Temple of Artemis was also a major treasury and bank of the ancient world, where merchants, kings, and even cities made deposits, and where their money could be kept safe under the protection of deity.’

His words enraged the mob, and they began to shout, ‘Great is Diana of the Ephesians!’ Acts 19:28 / 1 Kings 18:26 / Acts 19:34. We can understand why these people were upset. Imagine if you had a successful business and someone came along and more or less put your business at risk?

However, his business was more precious than truth; his business was more precious than his soul. When push comes to shove, it’s only when we seriously search our hearts that we will find out what is more important in our lives, Matthew 19:16-24.

These idol makers were more concerned about their temporary riches than they were concerned about the true eternal riches which can only be found in Christ Jesus.

Paul said to the church in Philippi, ‘For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain,’ Philippians 1:21. These idol makers said, ‘for them to live is making money from idols and to die is tragic’.

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

‘When pilgrims came to Ephesus, they liked to take a souvenir home. These silversmiths were makers of little silver model shrines which were bought and sold as souvenirs.’

And so everyone in Ephesus is upset that this apostle named Paul, whom they thought was trying to ruin their business, but in reality, he was trying to save their souls.

“Soon, the whole city was in an uproar. The people seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul’s travelling companions from Macedonia, and rushed as one man into the theatre. Paul wanted to appear before the crowd, but the disciples would not let him. Even some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, sent him a message begging him not to venture into the theatre. The assembly was in confusion: Some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people did not even know why they were there. The Jews pushed Alexander to the front, and some of the crowd shouted instructions to him. He motioned for silence in order to make a defence before the people. But when they realised he was a Jew, they all shouted in unison for about two hours: “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” Acts 19:27-34

They were so offended by such a message that Luke says the whole city came together to see what was happening, Acts 19:27. Along the way, they seized two Macedonian travel companions of Paul, Gaius and Aristarchus, Acts 27:2 / Colossians 4:10 / Philemon 1:24, but Paul wanted to go to the people; however, the brethren wouldn’t allow it, Acts 19:29-30.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Gaius was a common Greek name. This Gaius seems to have been different from the men with the same name mentioned in Acts 20:4, Romans 16:23, and 1 Corinthians 1:14, since this one was a Macedonian. Some Greek manuscripts, however, indicate that it was only Aristarchus who was a Macedonian, in which case this Gaius may have been the resident of Derbe mentioned in Acts 20:4. Aristarchus does appear later in Acts, Acts 20:4 / Acts 27:2. He came from Thessalonica.’

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘A Gaius, Acts 20:4, was Paul’s companion, but was there said to have been of Derbe; Paul baptized a Gaius in Corinth with his own hands, 1 Corinthians 1:14; and a Gaius was Paul’s host in Corinth when Romans was written, Romans 16:23; and the apostle John addressed his Third Epistle to Gaius, 3 John 1:1. This was a common name, however; and any certain identification of all or any of these as the same person is precarious.’

Even some of the Asian officials who were his friends also pleaded with him not to enter the theatre, Acts 19:31.

Interestingly, Luke says, ‘the assembly was in confusion: Some were shouting one thing, some another, Acts 19:32.

The Greek word translated ‘assembly’, Acts 19:39 / Acts 19:41, is ekklesia, the normal translation of which is ‘church’. Luke also says that many in the crowd didn’t even know why they were there,’ Acts 19:32.

It’s also interesting when we speak to some who profess to be Christians about why they attend a certain ‘church’, some say that they like the preacher, and some say they have always gone to ‘church’. Some say they enjoy listening to the band that helps them in their worship.

Worship that is accepted by God is a privilege, unique to the Christian. Peter tells us that it’s not a right to worship God because we are permitted to offer acceptable worship only by the grace of God, 1 Peter 2:4-5.

It is disheartening when children of God deliberately reject this privilege and stay away from the public assembly, which God has ordained for His glory and our good.

Some people in Ephesus didn’t even know why they were in that theatre, and now Ephesus is in an uproar. When some Jews singled out Alexander to make a defence, and the people found out he was a Jew, the crowd shouted, ‘Great is Diana of the Ephesians! once more, Acts 19:33-34 / Acts 19:28 / 1 Kings 18:26.

Josephus says the following.

‘This Alexander may be the one Paul warned Timothy about, 1 Timothy 1:19-20 / 2 Timothy 4:14, but he may have been someone different since Alexander was a common name among both Jews and Gentiles.’

Williams, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The noise must have been deafening. The acoustics of the theatre are excellent even today, and at that time were even better because of bronze and clay sounding vessels placed throughout the auditorium.’

“The city clerk quieted the crowd and said: “Men of Ephesus, doesn’t all the world know that the city of Ephesus is the guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of her image, which fell from heaven? Therefore, since these facts are undeniable, you ought to be quiet and not do anything rash. You have brought these men here, though they have neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess. If then, Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a grievance against anybody, the courts are open, and there are proconsuls. They can press charges. If there is anything further you want to bring up, it must be settled in a legal assembly. As it is, we are in danger of being charged with rioting because of today’s events. In that case, we would not be able to account for this commotion, since there is no reason for it.” After he had said this, he dismissed the assembly.” Acts 19:35-41

After two hours of shouting, Luke says that the city clerk silenced the crowd and appealed for a reason and a lawful approach to the matter, Acts 19:35. Here was a man who knew how to reason even with a mob, he said, no one could deny Ephesus was the guardian of Diana, and he proposed that Demetrius and his colleagues make their case before the authorities, Acts 19:35-36. That is, if they had a case in the first place.

When the facts were presented, he recognised that the disciples didn’t steal from the temples and they didn’t blaspheme their goddess, Acts 19:37. When he realised they had done nothing wrong, he warned the mob that such an assembly might be questioned by the Roman government and had no choice but to quietly dismiss the crowd, Acts 19:38-41 / 1 Corinthians 15:32 / 2 Corinthians 1:8-11.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘In context, that town-clerk’s actions bore the stamp of genius. Once more, the providence of God had preserved the life of the dauntless apostle, saving him and protecting him, without his so much as opening his mouth. How wonderful are the ways of the Lord.’

It’s amazing just how quickly a chaotic situation can be made calm when people are willing to reason together, Ephesians 6:10-20. So many church fights and splits and personal agendas would be laid to rest if people would only reason together, Isaiah 1:18.

Reasoning together involves more than one person; reasoning together means just that, we reason together. In other words, we respectfully listen to what each other is saying, think about what we are both saying and weigh it up with what the Scriptures teach, that’s reasoning together. And when we do that, the result will always be the same; we can part company quietly and without any further fuss.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘One wonders if the cooling of the Ephesian Christians’ love for Jesus Christ that took place in later years connects to the zeal for Artemis that characterised this community, Revelation 2:1-7.’

CHAPTER 20

INTRODUCTION

“When the uproar had ended, Paul sent for the disciples and, after encouraging them, said goodbye and set out for Macedonia. He travelled through that area, speaking many words of encouragement to the people, and finally arrived in Greece, where he stayed three months. Because the Jews made a plot against him just as he was about to sail for Syria, he decided to go back through Macedonia. He was accompanied by Sopater, son of Pyrrhus from Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, Gaius from Derbe, Timothy also, and Tychicus and Trophimus from the province of Asia. These men went on ahead and waited for us at Troas. But we sailed from Philippi after the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and five days later joined the others at Troas, where we stayed seven days.” Acts 20:1-6

THROUGH MACEDONIA AND GREECE

In the previous chapter, we left the apostle Paul in Ephesus, and we saw that many people gathered around to hear what he was saying. However, many of them who were in attendance didn’t even know why they were there in the first place. And so after all the trouble had calmed down, the city official sent everyone home, [Acts 19:8-12](#).

Luke begins this chapter by telling us that after the uproar had calmed down, Paul sent for the Ephesian disciples, encouraged them and then went on to Macedonia, [Acts 20:1](#).

He built up the churches before he went on to Greece, where he stayed for some three months, [Acts 20:2-3](#). He planned to sail to Syria, until the Jews plotted to kill him, [Acts 20:4](#).

Williams, in his commentary, says the following.

‘It may have been planned to attack him on board ship, especially if the vessel was crowded with Jewish pilgrims for Passover or Pentecost.’

When Paul found out about the plot against his life, he headed north back into Macedonia instead, [Acts 20:4](#).

Although Luke doesn’t mention any contribution, most scholars agree that Paul was carrying a large contribution to Jerusalem to help the needy saints, [Acts 11:27-30](#) / [1 Corinthians 16:1-4](#) / [2 Corinthians 8:1-9:15](#) / [Romans 15:14-32](#).

And he took along several men with him who more than likely served as witnesses to the proper handling of the money, [Acts 20:4](#). One commentator suggests it’s important to look at who these people are with Paul. He says the following.

‘You may observe that the Macedonian congregations were represented by Sopater, Aristarchus, and Secundus. The Galatian congregations were represented by Gaius of Derbe and Timothy of Lystra. The ones in Asia were represented by Tychicus and Trophimus. And according to [2 Corinthians 8:6ff](#), the Corinthians’ contribution was entrusted to Titus and two other brethren who were sent by Paul to Corinth to receive it.’

What’s so important about that? It’s interesting because it seems that they went around collecting the funds with the goal of meeting at a predetermined location, which would have been Troas, [Acts 20:5-6](#).

The point is, they didn’t have banks like we have today, where they can just wire or transfer some funds from one account to another. They had to travel from congregation to congregation to collect the funds.

People gave, and the funds were collected for a reason; they were given to some saints in need at Jerusalem. These men who were sent on behalf of their home congregations would have seen the gratitude in the eyes of those at Jerusalem as they gave on behalf of their congregation.

But the encouragement doesn’t stop there. Can you imagine when they return to their home congregations? I would imagine that they would give a full report about how everyone in Jerusalem was doing and how their offerings blessed so many other people.

When we see the offering that we give every week through those eyes, then truly we can see how much of a blessing it is to give. That’s exactly how Paul saw giving, ‘it’s more blessed to give than to receive’, [Acts 20:35](#).

Note that Luke uses the word ‘we’, [Acts 20:6](#) / [Acts 16:10-17](#) / [Acts 21:1-18](#). It is also used from [Acts 27:1](#) to [Acts 28:16](#). Luke does this simply to let Theophilus know that Luke himself re-joined Paul at Philippi, [Acts 16:40](#), and they both sailed for Troas after the Passover, [Acts 20:6](#).

TROAS

Coffman and Blaiklock, in their commentaries, say the following.

‘This seaport, situated at the western extremity of Asia, upon or near the site of ancient Troy, was rebuilt by the successors of Alexander the Great, who renamed the place Alexandria Troas. The importance of the place in New Testament history derives from its being: 1. the place where Paul met Luke, [Acts 16:8-11](#), 2. the gateway from Asia to Europe where a “door opened” for Paul, [2 Corinthians 2:12](#), 3. the scene of the remarkably important Lord’s day services, [Acts 20:7-12](#), and if Blaiklock’s deduction is correct, 4. the scene of Paul’s final arrest, [2 Timothy 4:13](#). Why did Paul leave his garment at Troas? Summary and inhuman arrest, apparently, denied him the comfort of adequate clothing.’

EUTYCHUS RAISED FROM THE DEAD AT TROAS

“On the first day of the week, we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight. There were many lamps in the upstairs room where we were meeting. Seated in a window was a young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep as Paul talked on and on. When he was sound asleep, he fell to the ground from the third story and was picked up dead. Paul went down, threw himself on the young man and put his arms around him. “Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “He’s alive!” Then he went upstairs again and broke bread and ate. After talking until daylight, he left. The people took the young man home alive and were greatly comforted.” [Acts 20:7-12](#)

When Luke tells us that Paul and his company stayed seven days in Troas, [Acts 20:6](#), this actually helps us a lot in our understanding of the custom of worship in New Testament times. Luke says, ‘they came together on the first day of the week to break bread’, [Acts 20:7](#).

Some groups come together to worship on Saturdays, but that’s not what is happening here; this was happening on the first day of the week, Sunday, [John 20:19](#) / [John 20:26](#) / [1 Corinthians 16:2](#) / [Revelation 1:10](#).

Even though they were busy doing other things for the Lord throughout the week, they knew that everything else takes a back seat to remembering the Lord’s death, [Luke 22:19](#).

Bruce, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The breaking of the bread probably denotes a fellowship meal in the course of which the Eucharist was celebrated, [Acts 2:42](#).’

Think about it? Jesus Christ was raised from the dead on a Sunday, the first day of the week, [Mark 16:9](#). And very early on, Jesus’ disciples began meeting together on the Lord’s Day, which was one week later, another Sunday, [John 20:6](#).

The church was established on what day? Sunday, [Acts 2:1](#). The congregation in Troas were meeting on the first day of the week, which is a Sunday, [Acts 20:7](#). There was a regular contribution to the church treasury when? ‘Every first day of the week’, [1 Corinthians 16:2](#).

For the first several centuries of the church's existence, the written testimony is uniform that Christians met for worship on Sunday. Although Sunday was a workday in the ancient world, the disciples set it apart for worship, and it became known as 'the Lord's day,' as John would tell us in Revelation 1:10.

One commentator says, 'all Christians were unanimous in setting apart the first day of the week, on which the triumphant Saviour arose from the dead, for the solemn celebration of public worship.'

In other words, the reason these early Christians assembled was to partake of the Lord's Supper, 1 Corinthians 11:20-22. We know they assembled not only to break bread every first day of the week, but also as Paul tells them to give on every first day of the week.

Luke tells us that when the church assembled in a third-story room, Paul's lesson continued until midnight, Acts 20:7-8. And it was here we find a young man who needed more than a cup of coffee to stay awake. A young man, named Eutychus, who was sitting in a window listening, went to sleep and fell out of the window, Acts 29:9. They went down straight away to see the young man and after he was pronounced dead, Paul took him up in his arms and announced that his life was still in him, Acts 20:9-10 / 1 Kings 17:21-22 / 2 Kings 4:34-35 / Matthew 9:23-25 / Mark 5:39. The power of God was being used through the apostle Paul who brought him back to life, Acts 9:36-42.

And to me, this text is almost unbelievable, not the miracle, but what they did next. Luke says that after the miraculous restoration of this young man's life, the Christians again assembled in their upper room to eat a meal together, Acts 20:11. It's as though raising someone back to life was the most normal event in a person's life. Notice they went upstairs again and broke bread and ate; this is a reference to a common meal, Acts 2:46, not the 'breaking of the bread,' the Lord's Supper, Acts 2:42.

The talking lasted until daybreak, the next day, Acts 20:11, which tells us just how highly the brethren thought of the apostle Paul. And they, along with the young man who was raised just hours before, walked home and greatly comforted, Acts 20:12.

Can we be sure that Eutychus was dead in the first place? We need to remember that if anyone knows whether a person is alive or dead more than anyone else, it's a doctor. And Luke, the writer of Acts, who is present with Paul at this moment in time, is a doctor, Colossians 4:14.

And it's Luke who tells us that Eutychus was 100% 'dead' in Acts 20:9. When Paul addressed the situation, he did not say, 'his life is 'still' in him,' or 'his life is 'yet' in him,' he simply said, 'his life is in him'. Luke later comments that Eutychus was brought 'alive' in Acts 20:12.

One usage of this term is to describe 'dead persons who return to life become alive again.' If the young man had merely been injured, why would Luke stress that he was 'brought alive'? To merely mention that he was brought alive again to the assembly would have been entirely sufficient.

After all, weren't they 'all' alive who returned to the upper room? What was so special about this young man? What was so special was the fact that 'he had been dead!' And now he's alive. No wonder Luke tells us that everyone was comforted, Acts 20:12.

Marshall, in his commentary, says the following.

'Paul's comment that the boy's life was in him refers to his condition after he had ministered to him. Luke would not have devoted space to the raising up of somebody who was merely apparently dead.'

The resurrection of Eutychus brought 'comfort' to the saints in Troas, Acts 20:12, for two reasons. First of all, it let them know that their religion was genuine. They understood that only God can perform a resurrection.

The miracle of raising Lazarus from the grave was performed so that the people around would come to the belief that Jesus was the Christ. And when the people believe that fact, then they would trust that the message which Christ came with was true and genuinely from God Himself, [John 11:40-42](#).

And that's the second reason why the resurrection of Eutychus brought 'comfort' to the saints in Troas. It brought them comfort because it showed them that the grave is not the end of human existence. The Creator is able to bring life out of death. In other words, death is not the end, but in many ways, it's just the beginning.

Now we can understand why the saints in Troas were comforted. We were all just as dead in our sins spiritually as Eutychus was dead physically. And just like Paul brought Eutychus back to life physically, Jesus Christ has brought you back to life spiritually, [Ephesians 2:1-5](#).

PAUL'S FAREWELL TO THE EPHESIAN ELDERS

"We went on ahead to the ship and sailed for Assos, where we were going to take Paul aboard. He had made this arrangement because he was going there on foot. When he met us at Assos, we took him aboard and went on to Mitylene. The next day, we set sail from there and arrived off Kios. The day after that, we crossed over to Samos, and on the following day, arrived at Miletus. Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus to avoid spending time in the province of Asia, for he was in a hurry to reach Jerusalem, if possible, by the day of Pentecost." Acts 20:13-16

Luke tells us that after the resurrection of Eutychus, the rest of the apostles' company travelled by ship to Assos, while Paul went on foot, [Acts 20:13](#).

Bruce, in his commentary, says the following.

'Paul stayed till the last possible moment, probably to be assured of Eutychus's complete restoration to consciousness and health, and then took a shortcut by land to join the ship at Assos.'

Paul joined them on the ship at Assos and went on with them to Mitylene, then by Chios, a brief stop at Samos, staying for a time at Trogyllium and had a more extended stay at Miletus, [Acts 20:14-15](#). Remember that Paul intended to sail by Ephesus in the hope of reaching Jerusalem before Pentecost, [Acts 20:16](#).

"From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. When they arrived, he said to them: "You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. I served the Lord with great humility and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews. You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you, but have taught you publicly and from house to house. I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus." Acts 20:17-21

While he was in Miletus, he called for the elders of the church at Ephesus to meet him there, [Acts 20:17](#) / [Acts 14:23](#) / [Acts 20:28](#). When Luke tells us that the elders from Ephesus arrived to meet Paul, he reminded them of the struggles he faced while in he was in Asia, [Acts 20:18](#) / [2 Corinthians 11:23-33](#).

Paul had served the Lord with a humble attitude, [Ephesians 4:1-2](#), even to the point of being moved to tears at times, [Acts 29:19](#) / [Acts 20:31](#), and surviving more than one Jewish plot against his life, [Acts 20:19](#) / [Acts 19:9](#) / [Acts 20:1](#).

Despite all that heartache and tears, he continued faithfully to declare the truth to them, both publicly in the synagogue and the school of Tyrannus and teaching in one house, then another, [Acts 19:20](#).

Notice also that his preaching had extended to the Jews as well as the Greeks, [Acts 20:21](#) / [John 17:3](#). His preaching included the need for repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following concerning repentance.

‘Repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, Acts 20:21, is a beautifully balanced way of expressing what is essential for justification, Acts 26:20-23 / Romans 10:9-10 / 2 Corinthians 5:20 to 2 Corinthians 6:2. One must change his or her mind Godward and place trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.’

“And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace. “Now I know that none of you, among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom, will ever see me again. Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God.” Acts 20:22-27

After reminding them of his time working among them, Paul goes and tells the elders that he was compelled by the Holy Spirit, Acts 21:10-11, to go on to Jerusalem, despite the knowledge of what awaited him there, Acts 20:22. It’s one thing not knowing what lies ahead of us, but it’s another knowing exactly what lies ahead. It’s during those difficult times of uncertainty of what lies ahead that things like worry and anxiety creep into our lives, 1 Peter 5:7. But that’s where genuine faith in God helps us through those difficult, uncertain times, Philippians 1:20. Luke tells us that the Holy Spirit had testified to Paul, through the voices of prophets and other inspired men, concerning his impending arrest and the other trials he would confront in Jerusalem, Acts 20:23. In other words, Paul knew exactly what was going to happen in his life; he knew what lay around the corner. Most of us usually run away from difficult times, and we try to avoid those times at any cost. And instead of embracing those times when they come and seeing them as an opportunity to grow in our faith, we avoid them instead, James 1:2-4.

Paul’s greatest concern was not for his own personal safety; Paul’s greatest concern was with completing the special ministry Jesus had given him or preaching the kingdom, which is the same thing, Acts 20:24. Make no mistake about it, Paul knew exactly what lay ahead of him, Psalms 16:8. He did not expect to ever see the faces of those elders again, Acts 20:25 / Romans 15:23-29. That’s why he called upon them to faithfully witness the content of his preaching among those at Ephesus, Acts 19:10.

He knew within himself that he was free from any responsibility for those who might have remained in their sin, Acts 20:26 / Jeremiah 23:1-2 / Ezekiel 33:1-6 / Acts 19:9-10. He knew because he had preached the whole truth, Acts 2:27 / 2 Timothy 4:3 / Matthew 4:4.

In other words, his job was finished in Ephesus, and he knew he was not responsible for those who didn’t respond to the good news. Paul didn’t see his mission with Christ as a problem; he saw it as a challenge.

Yes, there were times when he was beaten up and flogged, yes, there were times when he was tired, thirsty, and hungry. But his real challenge was to simply trust his God with that genuine faith, Philippians 3:10.

“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number, men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.” Acts 20:28-31

Before Paul leaves the Ephesian elders, he warns them because he did not anticipate seeing them again, Acts 20:26. He charged those overseers, elders, who had been selected on the basis of the qualifications listed by the Holy Spirit, to watch out for their own spiritual wellbeing, Acts 20:28 / Ezekiel 34:12-16 / 1 Peter 5:1-4 / Acts 14:23 / 1 Timothy 3:1-7 / Titus 1:6-9.

Stott, in his commentary, says the following.

‘They are to be shepherds of God’s church, poimanino meaning in general to tend a flock and in particular to lead a flock to pasture and so to feed it. This is the first duty of shepherds.’

He also reminds them that they were commanded to watch out for every sheep in God’s flock at Ephesus. Why? Because they had been given oversight, or made bishops, over the flock which was purchased with Jesus’ blood, [Acts 20:28](#) / [Romans 3:25](#) / [Romans 5:9](#) / [Ephesians 1:7](#) / [Ephesians 2:13](#) / [Colossians 1:20](#).

These false teachers, or savage wolves as Paul calls them, will come from among them and destroy the flock by distorting the truth, [Acts 20:29-30](#). False teachers were a problem in Paul’s day, and they are still a real problem in the world today. I believe all of us must be able to identify them and watch out for them, [2 Timothy 4:2-4](#) / [1 John 4:1-6](#).

The New Testament is filled with examples concerning false teachers and apostasy, [Matthew 7:15-23](#) / [2 Corinthians 11:3](#) / [2 Thessalonians 2:1-12](#) / [1 Timothy 4:1-5](#) / [2 Timothy 3:1-8](#) / [2 Timothy 4:1-5](#) / [2 Peter 2:1-3](#) / [2 Peter 3:1-7](#) / [Revelation 17:3-6](#) / [Revelation 18:1-5](#).

Paul warned the Ephesians elders to watch out for false teachers but he wasn’t finished with them just yet. Paul urged the elders to remember his own watchful service of three years as he had been warning them day and night, even with tears in his eyes, [Acts 20:31](#) / [John 11:35](#).

“Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I have not coveted anyone’s silver or gold or clothing. You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” When he had said this, he knelt down with all of them and prayed. They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship.” [Acts 20:32-38](#)

Paul recommended that the shepherds trust God and His Word, which would help them grow stronger and inherit eternal life, [Acts 20:32](#) / [1 Peter 5:1-4](#) / [Philippians 1:6](#) / [Colossians 3:24](#).

He reminded them that he worked with his own hands to support himself and did not covet anyone’s money, [Acts 20:33-34](#). He also urged them to labour to support themselves and help the weak, while reminding them that Jesus said, ‘it is more blessed to give than to receive’, [Acts 20:35](#).

Although we have no record of Jesus saying these words, this doesn’t mean He didn’t say them, [John 21:25](#), especially since Paul spent time with Him in Arabia, [Galatians 1:17](#).

When we think of giving, we often just think about giving money, but giving money isn’t going to help the man who has just lost his wife in a train crash; giving him time and a shoulder to cry on will.

Giving money isn’t going to help the woman whose husband has just walked out on her for someone else, giving time and understanding will. Giving money isn’t going to help the child who’s just failed one of their exams at school; encouraging them to keep going will.

It’s more blessed to give than to receive because genuine faith has learned to trust that God will meet all our needs. It’s more blessed to give than to receive because genuine faith has learned to put other people first.

It’s more blessed to give than to receive because genuine faith has learned that giving really does bring happiness into someone else’s life. It’s more blessed to give than to receive because genuine faith has learned that when we give, we’re giving on behalf of God, [Proverbs 21:25-26](#).

After kneeling with them in prayer, [Acts 20:36](#) / [Luke 22:41](#) / [Acts 7:60](#), everyone and probably Paul shed more tears, [Acts 20:37](#). They also shared a kiss, [Acts 20:37](#) / [Genesis 33:4](#) / [Genesis 45:14](#) / [Genesis 46:29](#) / [Romans 16:16](#) / [1 Corinthians 16:20](#) / [2 Corinthians 13:12](#) / [1 Thessalonians 5:26](#) / [1 Peter 5:14](#).

They knew they wouldn't see each other face to face again, Acts 20:38, and so, after an emotional farewell, they accompanied Paul to a ship, Acts 20:39.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

'Paul may have left Timothy in Ephesus at this time. However, it seems more likely that that took place after Paul's release from Rome, his departure from that city, and his return to Ephesus, 1 Timothy 1:3 / 1 Timothy 3:14 / 1 Timothy 4:13.'

It's sad to think that the church in Ephesus continued to do many great things, but they forgot their first love, Revelation 2:4.

CHAPTER 21

INTRODUCTION

"After we had torn ourselves away from them, we put out to sea and sailed straight to Cos. The next day, we went to Rhodes and from there to Patara. We found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, went on board and set sail. After sighting Cyprus and passing to the south of it, we sailed on to Syria. We landed at Tyre, where our ship was to unload its cargo. Finding the disciples there, we stayed with them seven days. Through the Spirit, they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem." Acts 21:1-4

ON TO JERUSALEM

In the previous chapter, we left the apostle Paul with tears in his eyes, warning the elders from Ephesus to be on their guard against false teachers. And we also saw very powerfully that Paul knew that his time on earth was coming to a close very soon, Philippians 1:21. He knew exactly what was about to happen to him as he departed from their company in Miletus.

We catch up with Paul's journey, and Luke tells us that they, including Luke, went from Cos to Rhodes, to Patara, Acts 21:1. Then, they boarded a ship sailing to Phoenicia, and they passed Cyprus and sailed to Syria, where they stopped at Tyre for the ship to unload its cargo, Acts 21:2-3 / Isaiah 60:9.

Robertson, in his commentary, says the following.

'Cos was an island 40 miles from Miletus. Rhodes refers to the city on the island of Rhodes, 'Rhodes' meaning 'roses,' another 90 miles farther. A gigantic statue of Apollo, the Colossus of Rhodes, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, stood astride the entrance to this harbour years earlier, but it was now in ruins. From there, Paul's party continued east to Patara, a 60-mile journey. Paul could have made these trips in three days. In Patara, the missionaries were able to transfer to a ship bound directly for Tyre, 400 miles away, probably a grain or fruit ship.'

It's here in Tyre that Paul and his companions sought out the Lord's followers in that city and stayed seven days with them, Acts 21:3, as he did at Troas, Acts 20:6, and Puteoli, Acts 28:14.

Since the Spirit played a key role in the start of this journey toward Jerusalem, Acts 20:22-23, it seems likely the disciples, having further revelations from the Spirit concerning Paul's coming imprisonment, begged him not to go, Acts 21:4.

Kent, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Paul, however, regarded it not as a prohibition but a divine forewarning so that he would be spiritually prepared for what would happen.’

Robertson, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Duty called louder than warning to Paul, even if both were the calls of God.’

“But when our time was up, we left and continued on our way. All the disciples and their wives and children accompanied us out of the city, and there on the beach we knelt to pray. After saying goodbye to each other, we went aboard the ship, and they returned home. We continued our voyage from Tyre and landed at Ptolemais, where we greeted the brothers and stayed with them for a day. Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven. He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.” Acts 21:5-9

Luke says that at the end of their weeklong visit, Paul’s company walked toward the ship with an escort composed of the many Christian men in the city of Tyre, Psalms 87:4, along with their wives and children, Acts 21:5. And look what they did before boarding the ship, they all stopped for prayer, Acts 21:5.

We don’t know exactly what it was they were praying for, but the fact that they begged Paul not to go tells me that they must have been asking God to be with Paul because of what was going to happen to him, Acts 9:16 / Acts 19:21 / Acts 20:22-24 / Acts 21:14 / Acts 23:1 / Acts 23:11.

Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

‘No man can read this narrative in a dispassionate manner without believing that they offered an extemporaneous prayer. No man can believe that Paul thus poured out the emotions of his heart in a prescribed form of words.’

Christians should always pray for safe journeys, no matter how long or short the journey is, Joshua 24:17-18 / Judges 18:5-6. And the reason for that is because we need to remind ourselves that we are never alone, we need to remember to take God with us.

After their prayer on the beach, Paul and those with him boarded the ship and the others returned home, Acts 21:6.

The ship went on from Tyre to Ptolemais, where they were again greeted by the brethren, Acts 21:7.

And after one day’s stay, they went on to Caesarea, where they spent some time in the house of Philip, the proclaimer of good news, Acts 21:8 / Ephesians 4:12 / 2 Timothy 4:5.

Who was this Philip? I believe it was the same Philip who is mentioned in Acts 6:5-6 and Acts 8:40, who was chosen for the ministration to the widows and the one who taught the Ethiopian. Notice they stayed at Philip’s house, Acts 21:8 / Acts 20:4-5.

McGarvey, in his commentary, says the following regarding Philip’s house.

‘His house must have been a capacious one, as it enabled him to entertain the nine men who made up Paul’s company.’

According to what we have just read, Philip had four virgin daughters who prophesied, Acts 21:9. Just like Miriam, Exodus 15:20, Deborah, Judges 4:4, Noadiah, Nehemiah 6:14, and Huldah, 2 Kings 22:14. It’s during Paul’s time at Philip’s house that we’re introduced to a man whom we have already met.

“After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. Coming over to us, he took Paul’s belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, “The Holy Spirit says, ‘In this way the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.’” When we heard this, we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, “Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.” When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, “The Lord’s will be done.” Acts 21:10-14

Luke tells us that Agabus also came to Philip's house at the same time as Paul's company, [Acts 21:10](#). This Agabus is the man who was one of the prophets who went to Antioch from Jerusalem.

He was the one who predicted a severe famine was going to spread throughout the Roman Empire, [Acts 11:27-28](#). But this time, he's not predicting a famine; he's predicting Paul's future.

Luke tells us that Agabus took Paul's belt, or girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, [Acts 21:11](#) / [Ezekiel 4:1-6](#). He then explained that the Holy Spirit was foretelling Paul's being taken prisoner by the Jews and turned over to the Gentiles, [Acts 21:11](#).

Understandably, all those who heard the prophecy, including Luke, begged Paul not to go to Jerusalem, [Acts 21:12](#). Again, we see Paul demonstrating in his life who carries the most influence. Not pain or suffering, death or even the fear of death was going to stop him from doing God's will, [Acts 21:13](#) / [Acts 19:21](#) / [Acts 20:22](#).

Tannehill, in his commentary, says the following.

'Paul, aware of the suffering and danger ahead, must make the same decision in Caesarea that Jesus made in the prayer scene before his crucifixion. In the prayer scene, Jesus expressed the two options himself in internal debate: 'Take this cup from me; nevertheless, let not my will but yours be done,' [Luke 22:42](#). In Paul's case, his companions and friends express the option of escape and appeal to Paul to choose it. Paul chooses the other option. The conflict finally ends when Paul's friends recognise that they cannot persuade him and say, 'Let the will of the Lord be done,' [Acts 21:14](#).'

Paul explained that his trip to Jerusalem was one he was making in an effort to fulfil his commission to preach the Gospel, [Matthew 10:28-29](#) / [Romans 14:8](#) / [Acts 20:22-23](#).

There's no use spending a lot of time worrying about dying because all of us will have to go sometime. But all of us need to spend a lot of our time preparing to meet our Maker. Everyone on earth, past, present and future will all have to meet our Maker, [Hebrews 9:27-28](#).

PAUL'S ARRIVAL IN JERUSALEM

"After this, we got ready and went up to Jerusalem. Some of the disciples from Caesarea accompanied us and brought us to the home of Mnason, where we were to stay. He was a man from Cyprus and one of the early disciples. When we arrived at Jerusalem, the brothers received us warmly. The next day, Paul and the rest of us went to see James, and all the elders were present. Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. When they heard this, they praised God." Acts 21:15-20

This was the fifth time that Paul had visited Jerusalem since he set out against the brethren at Damascus. Luke tells us that the group travelled on to Jerusalem, [Acts 19:21](#), where they planned to lodge with one of the early disciples named Mnason, who was from Cyprus, [Acts 21:15-16](#).

And they were joyfully greeted by the brethren in Jerusalem, [Acts 21:17](#), which Paul may well have viewed as an answer to the prayers he had been asking others to pray for him, [Romans 9:1-3](#) / [Romans 15:30-31](#).

Whether this was an answered prayer or not, at least it is another prayer that was answered; that is, the saints in Jerusalem received the gift of money which Paul brought to help the needy saints.

And so Luke tells us that the next day, Paul delivered a report to James, the half-brother of Jesus, [Acts 12:17](#) / [Acts 15:13](#), and all the elders concerning the things God had accomplished among the Gentiles through Paul, [Acts 21:19](#) / [Acts 14:27](#) / [Acts 18:23](#).

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Luke mentioned nothing about Paul’s delivery of the monetary gift, Paul’s main reason for going to Jerusalem, Romans 15:25-27 / 1 Corinthians 16:1-4.’

God did accomplish many things among the Gentiles through Paul; no wonder the group glorified God for the good which had been done, Acts 21:20.

“Then they said to Paul: “You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law. They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs.” Acts 21:20-21

The assembled group explained to Paul that thousands of Jews had obeyed the Gospel of Christ in Jerusalem, but they also still tried to adhere strictly to the Law of Moses, Acts 21:20-21. But as always, when people do great things from the Lord, there are always those in the background trying to discredit everything you have accomplished.

Someone, or some group, had spread the rumour that Paul taught Jews who lived among the Gentiles that they should forsake Moses’ law, especially by refusing to circumcise their children, Acts 21:21 / Romans 14:4-6.

Polhill, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The Jerusalem elders were in somewhat of a bind. On the one hand, they had supported Paul’s witness to the Gentiles at the Jerusalem Conference. Now they found Paul a persona non grata and his mission discredited not only among the Jewish populace, which they were seeking to reach, but also among their more recent converts. They did not want to reject Paul. Indeed, they praised God for his successes. Still, they had their own mission to the Jews to consider, and for that Paul was a distinct liability.’

We know that this was a false accusation because if we remember, Paul had actually circumcised Timothy with his own hand, Acts 16:3. What we also need to remember is that a full understanding of the effect of the cross on the ordinances of the Law of Moses would ultimately result in the end of circumcision as a religious act anyway, Ephesians 2:14-15 / Colossians 2:14. What happens next raises a few questions which need to be looked at carefully.

“What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come, so do what we tell you. There are four men with us who have made a vow. Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. Then everybody will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law. As for the Gentile believers, we have written to them our decision that they should abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality.” Acts 21:22-25

Naturally, the church would hear of Paul’s arrival in Jerusalem and would assemble. Therefore, James and the others proposed that Paul purify himself along with four men who had taken a vow, Acts 21:22-23 / Acts 18:18-21. Paul was also urged to pay the expenses involved in their vows, Acts 21:24.

Wesley, in his commentary, says the following.

‘James should have told those Jewish Christians: I do not keep the law of Moses; neither does Peter; neither need any of you!’

Why would Paul do that? If the Law of Moses and their customs were abolished at the cross of Christ, why would Paul do this? Simply because by doing this, Paul would silence those who were falsely charging him.

We need to ask ourselves, did Paul compromise his teachings about the law being a schoolmaster to lead men to Christ by purifying himself and paying for a vow under Moses’ law? Or did he recognise that these things did not have to do with salvation, so he could do them to further reach out to the Jews?

This is one of those questions for which we have no certain answer, but we point out this much about Paul's actions because some people seem to suggest that Paul sinned by doing what the officials asked.

We need to understand what 'ceremonial purification' involved. It did not necessarily involve atonement for personal sin, [Numbers 19:12](#). For example, a Jewish woman had to be 'purified' following the birth of a child, [Leviticus 12:1-7](#). We see Mary, after giving birth to Jesus, obeying this purification law, [Luke 2:22](#).

Remember, this law was to be obeyed even though the act of bearing a child is not sinful. The point I'm trying to make is that Paul's act of 'purification', doesn't mean that he was seeking personal forgiveness by means of an animal sacrifice.

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following.

'However we may consider this subject, it is exceedingly difficult to account for the conduct of James and the elders, and of Paul on this occasion. There seems to be something in this transaction which we do not fully understand.'

We're not sure why Paul did this, but I believe that Paul's actions kept the peace so that he could reach even more Jews with the good news, [1 Corinthians 9:20](#).

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following.

'Paul had shown them that their ceremonies were useless but not destructive; that they were only dangerous when they depended on them for salvation.'

But if there is anything we can get from this text, it's this: at least James and the elders were consistent in not requiring the Gentiles to follow the Law of Moses, [Acts 21:25](#) / [Acts 15:20](#) / [Acts 15:29](#).

PAUL ARRESTED

"The next day, Paul took the men and purified himself along with them. Then he went to the temple to give notice of the date when the days of purification would end, and the offering would be made for each of them. When the seven days were nearly over, some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul at the temple. They stirred up the whole crowd and seized him, shouting, "Men of Israel, help us! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against our people and our law and this place. And besides, he has brought Greeks into the temple area and defiled this holy place." (They had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with Paul and assumed that Paul had brought him into the temple area.) The whole city was aroused, and the people came running from all directions. Seizing Paul, they dragged him from the temple, and immediately the gates were shut." Acts 21:26-30

Luke tells us that Paul took the others with him and yielded to the proposal set forth by James and the others, and began to be purified, [Acts 21:26](#) / [Numbers 6:13-20](#), perhaps to enter the inner part of the temple.

Near the end of the seven days of purification, some Jews from Asia found Paul in the temple area and called for others to help them, [Acts 21:27](#). The Jews permitted Gentiles in the outer court of the temple, the court of the Gentiles, but they weren't permitted to go beyond the enclosure into the women's court, or into the court of Israel, much less into the court of the priests.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

'Jewish men like Paul, who were not priests or Levites, could go no farther than the court of Israel. The priests had posted notices prohibiting Gentiles from entering the sacred enclosure, the area that included the courts of the women, Israel, and the priests. These were in Latin and Greek and were on the barrier, the Soreg, at the foot of the steps leading to this area of the temple. Archaeologists have discovered two of these notices.'

One reads as follows, according to Barrett.

‘No man of another nation to enter within the fence and enclosure round the temple. And whoever is caught will have himself to blame that his death ensues.’

Josephus says the following.

‘The Romans allowed the Jews to execute any Gentile, even a Roman citizen, for proceeding beyond this low, stone barrier.’

These guys come along and accuse Paul of four things, [Acts 21:28](#) / [Acts 6:11](#) / [Acts 6:13-14](#). 1. Teaching against the Jews. 2. Teaching against the law. 3. Teaching against the temple. 4. Bringing Greeks into the temple, thereby defiling it.

As to the last charge, Luke reported that they had seen Paul in the city with Trophimus the Ephesian and supposed he had brought him into the temple, [Acts 21:29](#).

With all those accusations flying around, the angry mob seized Paul and dragged him into the court of the Gentiles, [Acts 21:30](#). They then closed the doors to the temple’s inner court so that no blood would defile it, [Acts 21:30](#). Make no mistake about it, this would have been a terrifying ordeal for anyone to go through.

I’m wondering if Paul remembered those wonderful words, ‘the Lord is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? The Lord is with me; he is my helper. I will look in triumph on my enemies,’ [Psalm 118:6-7](#). As Luke tells us next, we can see quite clearly that it wasn’t God’s will for Paul to be killed at this point in his life.

“While they were trying to kill him, news reached the commander of the Roman troops that the whole city of Jerusalem was in an uproar. He at once took some officers and soldiers and ran down to the crowd. When the rioters saw the commander and his soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. The commander came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains. Then he asked who he was and what he had done. Some in the crowd shouted one thing and some another, and since the commander could not get at the truth because of the uproar, he ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks. When Paul reached the steps, the violence of the mob was so great he had to be carried by the soldiers. The crowd that followed kept shouting, “Away with him!” [Acts 21:31-36](#)

While they were trying to kill Paul, [Acts 14:5](#) / [Acts 14:19](#), Luke tells us that through God’s providence, word reached the chief captain of the Roman garrison guarding Jerusalem, [Acts 21:31](#). His name is Claudius Lysias, [Acts 23:26](#).

He rushed in with perhaps three hundred men into the midst of the mob violence, and as they rushed in, the mob stopped beating Paul as they arrived, [Acts 21:32](#).

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘This is the sixth time in Acts that Paul’s ministry had ignited a public disturbance, [Acts 14:19](#) / [Acts 16:19-22](#) / [Acts 17:5-8](#) / [Acts 17:13](#) / [Acts 19:25-34](#).’

Agabus’ predictions came true, the chief captain ordered Paul to be bound with two chains, [Acts 12:6](#), and asked about his crime, [Acts 21:33](#) / [Acts 21:11](#). And the mob gave all sorts of answers to the crime which Paul supposedly committed, [Acts 21:34](#).

So the chief captain ordered Paul taken to the castle, [Acts 21:34](#). But even this was no easy task because the soldiers literally had to carry Paul as a large part of the crowd followed, shouting, ‘away with him’, [Acts 21:35-36](#) / [Acts 7:54-8:1](#) / [Acts 22:22](#).

Bruce, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The shout Away with him! which pursued him as he was carried up the steps was the shout with which Jesus’ death had been demanded not far from that spot some twenty-seven years before, [Luke 23:18](#) / [John 19:15](#).’

It's very difficult to appreciate what these early Christians went through, sometimes on a daily basis to remain true to God because we may never have to experience it in our lifetimes. Don't these accounts of Paul's struggles give us so much encouragement to keep going? [Philippians 3:10](#).

We sometimes read these accounts as though they were fictional figures in fictional places. The apostle Paul was a real person, travelling through real cities, going through real trials. And if we were to sit down with him and compare our trials, pains and sufferings with his, I believe we would come away very humbled.

PAUL SPEAKS TO THE CROWD

“As the soldiers were about to take Paul into the barracks, he asked the commander, “May I say something to you?” “Do you speak Greek?” he replied. “Aren't you the Egyptian who started a revolt and led four thousand terrorists out into the desert some time ago?” Paul answered, “I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no ordinary city. Please let me speak to the people.” Having received the commander's permission, Paul stood on the steps and motioned to the crowd. When they were all silent, he said to them in Aramaic.” [Acts 21:37-40](#)

Longenecker, in his commentary, says the following.

‘In this first of Paul's five defences, Luke's apologetic interests come to the fore in highlighting the non-political character of Christianity (contrary to other messianic movements of the day, [Acts 21:38](#)), and in presenting Paul's mandate to the Gentiles as being the major reason for Jewish opposition to the gospel, [Acts 22:10-22](#).’

We would think that Paul asking the chief captain, who had taken him prisoner, if he could speak would be a bad judgment on Paul's behalf. Especially after having his life threatened by the very people who are trying to kill him.

I'm pretty sure if that were you or me, we would be longing just to get out of there to be safe and away from the mob. Paul doesn't do that; he asks to speak to them, and when the captain heard Paul speak to him fluently in Greek, he was surprised, [Acts 21:37](#).

The reason he was surprised was that he had assumed that Paul was an Egyptian criminal. The captain thought that Paul was an Egyptian criminal who had led a band of some four thousand men in a rebellion, [Acts 21:38](#).

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The commander had assumed that Paul was a certain Egyptian who had appeared in Jerusalem three years earlier. This man claimed to be a prophet of God and announced that the wall of Jerusalem would collapse at his command. He further claimed that he would lead his followers from the Mount of Olives into Jerusalem, where they would defeat the Romans and throw off their yoke. The Romans, however, attacked this man's followers first and killed many of them, but he had escaped.’

Paul explained to the captain that he was a Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia, [Acts 21:39](#). Paul went on to ask the captain for permission to speak to the very multitude that only moments before had sought to kill him and when permission was granted.

Paul gestured with his hand to gain the attention of the audience, and a hush fell over the crowd, [Acts 21:40](#) / [Acts 12:17](#). And so, Paul then began to speak to them in Aramaic, [Acts 21:40](#) / [Romans 9:1-5](#).

Harrison, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Luke devotes considerable space to the record of Paul's last visit to Jerusalem, not because the visit was important in itself, but because it showed the final rejection of the gospel by Jerusalem.’

Sadly, this is another example of how chapter breaks really don't work at times. To read Paul's first defence, we need to move on to the next chapter.

CHAPTER 22

INTRODUCTION

“Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defence.” When they heard him speak to them in Aramaic, they became very quiet. Then Paul said: “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. Under Gamaliel, I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers and was just as zealous for God as any of you are today. I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, as also the high priest and all the Council can testify. I even obtained letters from them to their brothers in Damascus and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished.” Acts 22:1-5

In the previous chapter, we read how Paul explained to the captain that he was a Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia. He went on to ask the captain for permission to speak to the very multitude that only moments before had sought to kill him, and when permission was granted.

Paul gestured with his hand to gain the attention of the audience, and a hush fell over the crowd. Paul began to speak to them in Aramaic, and so, this chapter is a continuation of these events. Remember that most of Paul's audience was primarily Jewish; that's why he addresses them as 'brethren and fathers', Acts 22:1 / Acts 7:2.

Also remember, Paul's accusers had said he taught against the Jews, taught against the Law of Moses and the temple and brought Greeks into the temple, defiling the holy place, Acts 21:28. When Paul starts to speak in Aramaic, everyone becomes silent, Acts 22:2. Note that the footnote says he spoke in Hebrew.

Bruce, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Aramaic was not only the vernacular of Palestinian Jews, but was the common speech of all non-Greek speakers in western Asia, as far east as (and including) the Parthian empire beyond the Euphrates.’

Remember, Jesus promised His disciples that the Holy Spirit would tell them what to say in moments like these, Matthew 10:16-20 / Mark 13:9-11. Paul's response to their first accusation was that Paul himself was a Jew. He was born in Tarsus, but he was reared in the city of Jerusalem as a pupil of the highly respected Jewish teacher, Gamaliel, Acts 5:34. He had been taught the law, which was handed down from the Jewish fathers, in a most precise way, Acts 22:3 / Philippians 3:5.

In fact, he had become a zealot for God, just as had his accusers, Acts 22:3. His zeal had reached the point where he persecuted those following Christ's Way by binding, imprisoning and ultimately assisting in their deaths, Acts 22:4 / Acts 9:1-2.

What Paul does next is what any good lawyer would do in a courtroom situation, and that is call in the witnesses. As witnesses to his zeal, Paul mentioned the high priest and the council of the elders, Acts 22:5.

He tells the angry mob that he had personally received letters from the high priest and elders to give him authority to go to Damascus to bring Christians, those who are of the Way, from that city in chains to Jerusalem to be punished, Acts 22:5 / Acts 9:2.

It's much easier to talk to people when we have been in their shoes. Paul understood these people because he was just as zealous about their beliefs as they were. He had walked in their shoes and fully understood where they were coming from.

Because Paul sees himself as a sinner in need of salvation, and because he could relate to his Jewish audience because he's been where they are, **Romans 3:23**. It's no wonder that he goes on to share his testimony about his encounter with the risen Lord Jesus.

“About noon, as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, ‘Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?’ “‘Who are you, Lord?’ I asked. “‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting,’ he replied. My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to me. “‘What shall I do, Lord?’ I asked. “‘Get up,’ the Lord said, ‘and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.’ My companions led me by the hand into Damascus, because the brilliance of the light had blinded me.” **Acts 22:6-11**

Paul began to share with them about the unique bright light and conversation with the voice from heaven that he had while on the Damascus road. Remember, Luke had already reported this to Theophilus in **Acts 9**, but here Paul adds the fact that the bright light was seen at noon when it outshone the sun at its brightest, **Acts 22:6**.

In many ways, not only was Paul blinded by the light, but we were also all blinded by that same light, **2 Corinthians 4:4**. We all need to be able to talk about our road to Damascus to unbelievers because we've all been there.

When we were merrily walking along life's road, when all of a sudden we 'heard' someone speak about God, **Romans 10:17**. And then we were blinded by the bold truth that we are sinners and in need of rescuing from our sins. Blinded by the truth that we can't make it to heaven on our own, we need Jesus to help us.

Blinded by the truth that our lives were in a mess, and no one could help except God Himself. Blinded by the bold truth that no one would forgive us for the things we had done in the past except God Himself.

Paul fell to the ground, and the voice asked why he was persecuting Him, **Acts 22:7**. And to accurately answer the question, Saul as he was known at that time, had to know who was speaking and Jesus then clearly identified himself to him, **Acts 22:8**. Remember that the only sense in which Saul, or Paul, persecuted Jesus was in that he persecuted the church or Jesus' body, **Acts 22:8 / Acts 9:4**.

Paul continues and tells them that his travelling companions were afraid and did not hear the voice of our Lord in the sense that they did not understand it nor obey it, **Acts 22:9**.

McGarvey, in his commentary, says the following.

‘It is common among all classes of men to say (of a speaker) I did not hear, not meaning they could not hear the sound of the speaker's voice, but that they could not hear what he said.’

But Saul fully understood and asked what the Lord would have him do. And so Jesus tells him to go into the city to be told what was planned for him, both in reference to his own salvation and that of many others, **Acts 22:10 / Acts 22:8 / Acts 9:6**. And so off they went, with Paul's companions leading him to Damascus because he was blind, **Acts 22:11 / Acts 9:9**.

“A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there. He stood beside me and said, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight!’ And at that very moment, I was able to see him. “Then he said: ‘The God of our fathers has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. You will be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.’ “When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I fell into a trance and saw the Lord speaking. ‘Quick!’ he said to me. ‘Leave Jerusalem immediately, because they will not accept your testimony about me.’ “‘Lord,’ I replied, ‘these men know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in you. And when the blood of

your martyr Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.’ “Then the Lord said to me, ‘Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’” Acts 22:12-21

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Paul next related the events of his conversion and stressed the supernatural revelation God had given him. This revelation accounted for the radical change in his life. This account of Paul’s conversion harmonises with the other two accounts of it that Luke, Acts 9:3-19, and Paul, Acts 26:12-18, gave us in Acts.’

In Damascus, a devout, God-fearing man named Ananias came to Paul, restored his sight and told him that God had appointed him to know His will, see the Righteous One and hear His voice, Acts 22:12-14 / Acts 22:8.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Paul here recounted the twin miracles of his own supernatural blinding and of the restoration of his eyesight by Ananias, another remarkable sign. In this manner, Paul was further ‘qualifying the witness,’ looking to the testimony of Ananias he was about to quote.’

He further said God planned for him to be a witness to all men, Luke 2:30-32 / Luke 3:6, and told Paul to be baptised in order to have his sins washed away, Acts 22:15-16 / Acts 9:18 / 1 Corinthians 6:11 / Titus 3:5 / Ephesians 5:26 / 1 Peter 3:21.

What does ‘calling upon His Name mean? Acts 22:16. In Christianity today, the phrase, ‘calling upon the Name of the Lord,’ has become used by many as a phrase by which a person can be saved without doing anything else.

As a result, after admitting they are sinners, many people now believe they are saved simply because they called on Jesus to save them. Let’s go ahead and see if we can understand what this phrase actually means.

The first time the phrase is used in the Old Testament is by the prophet Joel, speaking of what people will do in the future in order to be saved, Joel 2:32. And the first time it’s used in the New Testament is by Peter as he quotes Joel’s words in the very first Gospel sermon ever preached in Acts 2:16-21, which tells us that Joel’s prophecy was fulfilled during this time.

When we carefully read Acts 2, after informing those present that ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’, we see the response of those present, they asked, ‘What shall we do?’ Acts 2:37, they were asking, what must they do to be saved?

In what way do we call upon the Lord? If calling on the Name of the Lord simply meant confessing your sinfulness and inviting Jesus into your heart, then surely, Peter would have told them to do just that, but he didn’t.

Notice what those present on that day did, even before they asked the question, ‘What must we do?’ They heard the Gospel, Acts 2:14 / Acts 2:41, and they believed the Gospel, Acts 2:37, and they repented of their sins, Acts 2:38 / Acts 2:41. So what we see here are faith, repentance and baptism. This was how they called upon the Name of the Lord.

The apostle Paul had been taught the Gospel and demonstrated faith and repentance, Acts 22:6-10. Again, if calling upon the Name of the Lord simply meant confessing your sinfulness and inviting Jesus into your heart, then surely, Ananias would have told Him to do just that, but he didn’t.

Again, what we see in Acts 22:16 is faith, repentance and baptism, Acts 9:18. This was how Paul called upon the Name of the Lord. A little later, Paul goes on to write about how God saves people from their sins when he writes to the Romans. Notice also that he quotes from Joel 2:32, just as Peter did.

It’s such a shame that many people just read Romans 10:13 without reading it in its context. A careful reading of the text shows us that calling on the Name of the Lord involves hearing and believing the Gospel, Romans 10:14.

It involved a change of heart, which is repentance, and it involved publicly confessing faith in Jesus as the Christ, Romans 10:9-10; it involved obeying the commands of the Gospel, Romans 10:16 / Romans 10:19-21.

If calling on the Name of the Lord simply meant confessing your sinfulness and inviting Jesus into your heart, then surely, Paul would have told them to do just that, but he didn't.

After saying, 'everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord will be saved,' he goes on to ask a series of questions that tell us what this phrase means, **Romans 10:13-17**.

In other words, to call upon the name of the Lord means we must hear the Gospel, believe the Gospel and obey the Gospel. When someone calls upon the name of the Lord, they are simply obeying God's plan of salvation to hear God's word, believe that Jesus is the Son of God, repent and be baptised.

CONCLUSION

As I mentioned earlier, there are thousands of people in the religious world today who believe they are saved because they've called upon the name of the Lord. Sadly, saying the name 'Lord' won't save anyone, **Matthew 7:21-23**, it won't save anyone unless it's accompanied by obedience to the Gospel, **Matthew 29:19-20 / Mark 16:16 / Luke 6:46**. Notice that Paul fell into a trance and saw the Lord speaking to me, **Acts 22:17**. This trance happened when he was taken up to the third heaven, which is paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell, **2 Corinthians 12:1-4**.

Paul then told the multitude that he returned to Jerusalem and was praying when the Lord told him to leave quickly because they would not receive his testimony, **Acts 22:18**. Paul then proceeds to speak about how he approved the death of Stephen, **Acts 22:20 / Acts 8:1**.

Even though Paul argued with the Lord, telling Him the Jews knew of his zeal, the Lord told Paul to depart because He would send him to the Gentiles, **Acts 22:21 / Acts 9:15-16 / Acts 9:26-29 / Galatians 1:18-19**. It appears that the crowd were perfectly willing to listen to Paul until he mentioned the taboo subject of the Gentiles, **Acts 22:21 / Acts 2:38-39 / Acts 9:15**.

Walker, in his commentary, says the following.

'The despised word 'Gentiles' was a red flag to those wild, savage bulls of hate.'

"The crowd listened to Paul until he said this. Then they raised their voices and shouted, "Rid the earth of him! He's not fit to live!" As they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air, the commander ordered Paul to be taken into the barracks. He directed that he be flogged and questioned in order to find out why the people were shouting at him like this." **Acts 22:22-24**

If there were ever an eloquent and confident speaker with a reason to run away, the apostle Paul would always come to mind. But as we read here, eloquence and confidence in speaking aren't going to help anyone if your audience has already made their minds up, **2 Corinthians 4:4**.

To understand the Jews' reaction to Paul's words, we really need to understand the Jews. A Jew could not stand the Gentiles; in fact, the Jew saw the Gentiles as unclean.

If a Jew were walking down the street and he saw a Gentile coming toward him, the Jew would cross the street to avoid being anywhere near him. Luke tells us that the Jews' hatred of the Gentiles was so great that the very mention of them enraged the audience and moved them to call for Paul's death, **Acts 22:22**.

Bock, in his commentary, says the following.

'The bulk of Jerusalem has reacted now against Jesus, Peter, John, Stephen, and Paul. For Acts, this is a final, key rejection of the gospel.'

They began to throw their garments and dust in the air, Acts 22:23, perhaps in preparation to stone the apostle. And so the chief captain had Paul taken into the castle and prepared to flog him until he told the truth, Acts 22:24 / Matthew 27:26 / Acts 9:15-16 / 2 Corinthians 11:24-25.

Boice, in his commentary, says the following.

‘This was not the normal Jewish flogging, which was bad enough, but the dreaded Roman flagellum. It was a beating so severe that in some cases it resulted in the death of the victim.’

PAUL THE ROMAN CITIZEN

“As they stretched him out to flog him, Paul said to the centurion standing there, “Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn’t even been found guilty?” When the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and reported it. “What are you going to do?” he asked. “This man is a Roman citizen.” The commander went to Paul and asked, “Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?” “Yes, I am,” he answered. Then the commander said, “I had to pay a big price for my citizenship.” “But I was born a citizen,” Paul replied. Those who were about to question him withdrew immediately. The commander himself was alarmed when he realised that he had put Paul, a Roman citizen, in chains.” Acts 22:25-29

They planned to have Paul flogged and interrogated, Acts 22:24, but Paul, being the educated man that he was, knew his rights, and he knew the law. So he asked if the law would allow them to flog an uncondemned Roman citizen, Acts 22:25.

The centurion in charge of the flogging didn’t want to break the law, so he immediately told the chief captain, who, in turn, asked if Paul was a Roman, Acts 22:26 / Acts 21:33. And so, after Paul said yes, the captain said that he had bought those privileges for a great sum of money, Acts 22:27-28.

Dummelow, in his commentary, says the following.

‘It is evident that the chief captain had not bought his citizenship under Claudius (41-54 A.D.), who sold it for a merely nominal sum.’

Bruce, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Something of this sort may have been in the tribune’s mind as he said, It cost me a very large sum of money to obtain Roman citizenship, the implication being that the privilege must have become cheap of late if such a sorry-looking figure as Paul could claim it.’

But Paul didn’t pay for the privilege of being a Roman citizen. Paul said he was born into Roman citizenship, Acts 22:28.

Longenecker, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The verbal claim to Roman citizenship was accepted at face value; penalties for falsifying documents and making false claims of citizenship were exceedingly stiff. Epictetus speaks of death for such acts.’

And so, before making a terrible mistake by having Paul flogged, everyone quickly withdrew, but the captain was still worried because he had bound a Roman citizen, Acts 22:29. Why was he worried?

Well, not only did he understand that the Roman law prohibited Roman citizens from being flogged without a trial, but he also understood that the law prohibited Roman citizens from being bound without being charged first, Acts 16:37-39. Citizenship had its privileges, and God used those privileges to protect Paul until God got Paul where he needed to be, which was Rome, Romans 15:23-32.

Longenecker, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Roman law protected Roman citizens from the scourge (Lat. flagellum) before they went on trial and even if they were guilty.’

Make no mistake about it, Paul was a Roman citizen, but he understood where his real citizenship lay. He says to the church in Philippi, ‘our citizenship is in heaven,’ **Philippians 3:20**. He says, ‘is’ in heaven, present tense, in other words, heaven is our present possession.

The Philippians could understand that when we remember that Philippi was a Roman colony. It was six hundred miles from Rome, and a lot of people had never been to Rome, but they were Roman citizens. They dressed like Romans, they ate like Romans, they spoke the Roman language, they lived the Roman culture, and they obeyed the Roman laws.

But what Paul is saying is, ‘we too are citizens of a city we haven’t seen yet, talk like heaven people, dress like heaven people, obey the laws of heaven, live the culture of heaven.’ In other words, he says, ‘he wants us to live here like we’re already there, let our walk reflect where we’re going’.

PAUL BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

“The next day, since the commander wanted to find out exactly why Paul was being accused by the Jews, he released him and ordered the chief priests and all the Sanhedrin to assemble. Then he brought Paul and had him stand before them.” Acts 22:30

Paul told the officials, ‘after’ they had been beaten in Philippi about his citizenship, and everyone panicked and asked them to leave the city, **Acts 16:16-40**.

But here, Paul pulls out his ‘get out of jail free card’ again and tells the Sanhedrin about his citizenship, and they, too, panic. The chief priests and all the council were commanded to come together, while Paul was standing before them, **Acts 22:30**.

Boice, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The Roman commander ‘must have thought that once he had a concrete accusation, he would be able to decide what to do.’

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘This was at least the sixth time that the Sanhedrin had to evaluate the claims of Christ. The first occasion was when it met to consider reports about Jesus, **John 11:47-53**, and the second was Jesus’ trial, **Matthew 26:57-68 / Matthew 27:1-2 / Mark 14:53-65 / Mark 15:1 / Luke 22:66-71**. The third meeting was the trial of Peter and John, **Acts 4:5-22**, the fourth was the trial of the Twelve, **Acts 5:21-40**, and the fifth was Stephen’s trial, **Acts 6:12-7:60**.’

Sadly, this is another example of how chapter breaks really don’t work at times. To read what Paul said before the Sanhedrin, we need to move on to the next chapter.

CHAPTER 23

INTRODUCTION

“Paul looked straight at the Sanhedrin and said, “My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day.” At this, the high priest Ananias ordered those standing near Paul to strike him on the mouth. Then Paul said to him, “God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! You sit there to judge me according to the law, yet you yourself violate the law by commanding that I be struck!” Those who were standing near Paul said, “You dare to insult God’s high priest?” Paul replied, “Brothers, I did not realise that he was the high priest; for it is written: ‘Do not speak evil about the ruler of your people.’” Acts 23:1-5

In the previous chapter, we read how Paul pulled out his ‘get out of jail free card’ and told the Roman authorities about his citizenship, and they panicked. The chief priests and all the council were commanded to come together, while Paul was standing before them.

As Paul stood looking straight at the Sanhedrin, Paul told them he had lived his life for God until that very time, Acts 23:1 / Acts 20:18-21 / Acts 20:26-27 / Acts 24:16 / 1 Corinthians 4:4 / Philippians 3:6 / Hebrews 9:14 / 2 Timothy 1:3.

Bruce, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Paul might well appeal to the testimony of conscience as he stood before the supreme court of Israel; it was on no righteousness of his own, however, that he relied for justification in the heavenly court. The purest conscience was an insecure basis of confidence under the scrutiny of God.’

But Paul’s announcement about his clear conscience didn’t go down very well with Ananias, the high priest. He commanded the man next to Paul to strike him, Acts 23:2, which was a violation of their law, Deuteronomy 25:1-2 / John 18:20-23. They broke God’s law by striking Paul on the mouth.

Hughes, in his commentary, says the following.

‘This order was illegal, for the Jewish law said, ‘He who strikes the cheek of one Israelite, strikes as it were the glory of God,’ and ‘He that strikes a man strikes the Holy One.’

And so Paul, with the voice of prophecy, told Ananias that God would strike him who was a whitewashed wall, Ezekiel 13:10-16 / Matthew 23:27, because he sat to judge the apostle by the law but violated it by having a man struck before he had been tried and found guilty, Acts 23:3.

This is very interesting because, according to Jewish history, Ananias was murdered by his own people just a few years later at the beginning of the Jewish war.

Josephus, in his writings, says the following.

‘Ananias became high priest in A.D. 47. The Jewish high priesthood was a political appointment during Rome’s occupation of Palestine. Josephus painted Ananias as a despicable person. He seized for his own use tithes that should have gone to the ordinary priests and gave large bribes to Romans and Jews. The emperor summoned him to Rome on charges of being involved in a bloody battle between Jews and Samaritans, but he escaped punishment. He was very wealthy and resorted to violence and even assassination to accomplish his ends. He was also very pro-Roman, and the Jews finally assassinated him in their uprising against Rome in A.D. 66, nine years after Paul stood before him.’

Those standing by asked Paul if he was insulting the high priest, Acts 23:4, who, of course, was one with certain authority, Exodus 22:28. Why did Paul insult the high priest? It is possible that Paul didn’t know who he was. How did Paul not know that Ananias was the high priest? It’s possible that since the Sanhedrin was not an informal assembly, Ananias may not have had on an official dress.

It's also possible, as some suggest, that Paul's thorn in the flesh, 2 Corinthians 12:8-10, his eyesight wasn't good at this point, Galatians 4:14-15 / Galatians 6:11.

Ananias may not have been the actual high priest at that time, because the title was also used for former high priests and those who were merely from the family out of which he was chosen.

Notice what Paul did as soon as he discovered Ananias was the high priest. Once Paul knew who he spoke against, he immediately apologized noting that it was against the law to speak against a ruler of God's people, Acts 23:5. And what happens next is one of the finest examples we have of divide and conquer.

“Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, “My brothers, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead.”
Acts 23:6

Luke tells us that when Paul looked around at his audience, he saw the council was comprised of both Pharisees and Sadducees, Acts 23:6 / Matthew 16:1 / John 11:47-53.

And so he begins his defence by saying he was a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee and brought up on charges because of his belief in the resurrection of the dead, Acts 23:6 / Acts 24:15 / Acts 24:21 / Acts 26:6-8 / Acts 26:23 / Acts 28:20.

Why would Paul say he was brought before them because of his belief in the resurrection? If we think about the Gospel, as we have already seen time and time again, when we preach the Gospel, we have to include the preaching of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 1 Corinthians 15:3-4. And so, Paul uses his belief in Jesus' resurrection to divide and conquer.

“When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. (The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.) There was a great uproar, and some of the teachers of the law who were Pharisees stood up and argued vigorously. “We find nothing wrong with this man,” they said. “What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?” The dispute became so violent that the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them. He ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force and bring him into the barracks.” Acts 23:7-10

Luke tells us that Paul's statement immediately created a division between the Pharisees, who believed in the resurrection and the Sadducees, who didn't, Acts 23:7-8.

It got to the stage where some of the scribes who were Pharisees actually stood up and said they could not find any fault in Paul, Acts 23:9. In fact, they almost defend Paul by wondering if the apostle had been spoken to by a spirit or an angel, Acts 23:9 / Acts 5:38-39.

Remember, the Pharisees believed in spirits and angels, but the Sadducees didn't, and so, because of these two different beliefs, the dissension between the two groups was so great that the chief captain had Paul withdrawn to the castle, afraid he would be torn apart by them, Acts 23:10 / Acts 24:20-21.

If we believe that Paul's situation was terrifying, we would be right to think that, but Paul, being the faithful Christian that he was, kept his focus on the mission ahead of him that God gave him. God didn't want to let Paul get too comfortable on this earth, and He doesn't want us to get too comfortable.

Why does God allow trials and sufferings in our lives? Because he doesn't want us to get too comfortable in this world. He wants us out of our comfort zones, and He wants us to grow, and He wanted Paul to take the Gospel to Rome, and He wants us to take the Gospel somewhere too, Matthew 28:19-20 / Mark 16:15-16.

The Roman Empire believed that it was the light of the world, but Paul knew all too well that Rome was still in the dark and the Gospel was the real light, John 8:12.

If we, like torches of God's light, **Matthew 5:14-16**, continue to shine every day of our lives, Satan will never have an opportunity to come in and tempt us to corrupt our lives with sin, **Psalm 139:7-12**. And so because Paul was afraid, God was about to intervene and give him courage.

“The following night, the Lord stood near Paul and said, “Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.” **Acts 23:11**

God was saying to Paul, ‘Take courage’ **Acts 23:11**, because I am with you always, to the very end of the age, **Matthew 28:20**. ‘Take courage’ because never will I leave you, never will I forsake you, **Hebrews 13:5**.

‘Take courage, what can mortal man do to you?’ **Psalm 56:4**. ‘Take courage’ because I’m in control of your destiny as long as you follow my will, **Romans 8:35**.

The Lord has been protecting Paul up to this point, and He is going to continue to protect him until God gets him where he wants him to be, which is Rome, **Acts 19:21** / **Psalm 37:4** / **Romans 9:1-4** / **Romans 15:24**.

THE PLOT TO KILL PAUL

“The next morning, the Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves with an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul. More than forty men were involved in this plot. They went to the chief priests and elders and said, “We have taken a solemn oath not to eat anything until we have killed Paul. Now then, you and the Sanhedrin petition the commander to bring him before you on the pretext of wanting more accurate information about his case. We are ready to kill him before he gets here.” **Acts 23:12-15**

These people are determined to kill Paul come hell or high water, and they will go to any lengths to achieve that goal, **Romans 10:2**. Luke tells us that the next morning, more than forty Jews took an oath to neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul, **Acts 23:12-13** / **Acts 21:27-29**.

And so, the forty-plus men reported their plan to the chief priests and elders and enlisted their help in a conspiracy by asking for time to get the captain to bring Paul before the council again to judge his case more thoroughly, **Acts 22:14-15**.

Make no mistake about it, they were hoping to kill Paul as he was being brought from the barracks to the council meeting place, **Acts 9:23-25** / **Acts 9:29-30** / **Acts 20:3**.

Even with the Lord's assurance, **Acts 23:11**, I'm sure that with all the hostility the Jews had shown Paul since his arrival in Jerusalem, Paul may have doubted if he would ever escape that city and fulfil his desire to preach in Rome. Paul may have had his doubts about God's promise to him whilst he was in Jerusalem, but he never gave up on the truth that all things would work according to God's purpose, **Romans 8:28**. We might have our moments of doubt, but we need to hang on to the words of Paul himself when he writes to the church in Corinth, **2 Corinthians 1:3-7**. When we handed our life over to Jesus Christ, we signed up to suffer for Jesus Christ, **2 Timothy 3:12**. When we told Satan we don't want anything more to do with him, he made us public enemy number one, and he is not going to let us leave him without a fight, **Ephesians 6:10-20**.

Notice what Paul told the church in Corinth: it's not all about suffering, it's also about comfort, **2 Corinthians 1:3-7**. One of the ways that God sends that comfort to us is by sending His people to minister to us on His behalf, and sometimes that can happen without us even being aware of it. My point is that God is always one step ahead of us, and I think that's one of the points that Luke is going to tell us about next.

“But when the son of Paul's sister heard of this plot, he went into the barracks and told Paul. Then Paul called one of the centurions and said, “Take this young man to the commander; he has something to tell him.” So he took him to the commander. The centurion said, “Paul, the prisoner, sent for me and asked me to bring this young man to you

because he has something to tell you.” The commander took the young man by the hand, drew him aside and asked, “What is it you want to tell me?” He said: “The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul before the Sanhedrin tomorrow on the pretext of wanting more accurate information about him. Don’t give in to them, because more than forty of them are waiting in ambush for him. They have taken an oath not to eat or drink until they have killed him. They are ready now, waiting for your consent to their request.” The commander dismissed the young man and cautioned him, “Don’t tell anyone that you have reported this to me.” Acts 23:16-22

Luke clearly tells us that God is one step ahead of the game. God knows what was going to happen next in Paul’s life. That’s why God, in His providence, had Paul’s sister’s son in a position to hear the plot in the first place, Acts 23:16 / Acts 23:11.

That’s why he entered the barracks where the apostle was being kept and informed him of the intention of the conspirators. That’s why Paul immediately called for a centurion and asked him to take his nephew to the chief captain, Acts 23:17.

That’s why the centurion brought this young man to the commander, Acts 23:18. That’s why the commander asked Paul’s nephew what he had to tell him, Acts 23:19.

That’s why he revealed the entire plot against his uncle, Acts 23:20-21. And that’s why the chief captain then asked him to tell no one what he had reported to him in private and let the young man go, Acts 23:22.

Yes, there are times when we think our lives are out of control, but God is one step ahead of us, just like He was one step ahead of Paul and the Jews who were plotting to kill him. Paul is in God’s hands, and so, because of God’s providence, Luke goes on to tell us about how God’s providence is going to save Paul’s life.

PAUL TRANSFERRED TO CAESAREA

“Then he called two of his centurions and ordered them, “Get ready a detachment of two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen to go to Caesarea at nine tonight. Provide mounts for Paul so that he may be taken safely to Governor Felix.” Acts 23:23-24

Notice that God doesn’t do things by half; when He protects His people, He protects them. And so, acting on God’s providence, the chief captain, whose name was Claudius Lysias, immediately called two centurions to him, Acts 23:23.

He commanded them to get two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen ready to escort Paul to Caesarea at the third hour of the night, as some translations have it, which would be around 9:00 pm, Acts 23:23 / Acts 9:25 / Acts 17:10.

They were also instructed to provide mounts for Paul and take him to the governor, Felix, who occupied much the same position as Pilate had in Christ’s day, Acts 23:24. And so, Luke reports to Theophilus what Claudius Lysias wrote in a letter to Governor Felix.

“He wrote a letter as follows: Claudius Lysias, To His Excellency, Governor Felix: Greetings. This man was seized by the Jews, and they were about to kill him, but I came with my troops and rescued him, for I had learned that he is a Roman citizen. I wanted to know why they were accusing him, so I brought him to their Sanhedrin. I found that the accusation had to do with questions about their law, but there was no charge against him that deserved death or imprisonment. When I was informed of a plot to be carried out against the man, I sent him to you at once. I also ordered his accusers to present to you their case against him.” Acts 23:25-30

Since we know that Festus took Felix’s place in 59 A.D. and Paul was with him for two years, we can conclude that Paul was sent to him in 57 A.D. Lysias, according to Luke, sent a letter to Felix which contained the gist of what was happening, Acts 23:25-26. Remember that He had Paul taken prisoner and put him in chains, which was breaking the Roman Law about Roman citizenship, Acts 22:25-29.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘This is the first mention of the commander’s name in Acts. His Greek name was Lysias, and when he purchased his Roman citizenship, Acts 22:28, he must have also taken the Roman name of the emperor. Felix was the governor of the Roman province of Syria, which included Judea. Claudius Lysias addressed Felix politely, Acts 1:1 / Acts 24:2 / Acts 26:25.’

Notice that Lysias slightly glorifies the story by telling Felix that he learned Paul was a Roman and so saved him from the mob, Acts 23:27, but he didn’t mention the fact that he had Paul placed in chains.

Lysias says in his opinion, Paul had done nothing worthy of either prison or death, Acts 23:28-29 / John 18:38. And since he had learned of the conspiracy to murder Paul, he informed Felix that he sent the apostle to him and commanded the Jews to appear before the governor to present their case, Acts 23:30.

“So the soldiers, carrying out their orders, took Paul with them during the night and brought him as far as Antipatris. The next day, they let the cavalry go on with him, while they returned to the barracks. When the cavalry arrived in Caesarea, they delivered the letter to the governor and handed Paul over to him. The governor read the letter and asked what province he was from. Learning that he was from Cilicia, he said, “I will hear your case when your accusers get here.” Then he ordered that Paul be kept under guard in Herod’s palace.” Acts 23:31-35

With the letter in their hands, Luke tells us the soldiers took Paul and the letter and marched between twelve and sixteen miles to Antipatris, Acts 23:31.

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Up to Antipatris (about 25 miles) the country was dangerous and inhabited by Jews; after that the country was open and flat, quite unsuited for any ambush and largely inhabited by Gentiles.’

The next day, the soldiers and spearmen returned to their barracks, and the horsemen went with Paul to Caesarea, some twenty-six miles further north, Acts 23:32.

And when they arrived there, they presented Paul to the governor, along with the letter, Acts 23:33. When Felix read the letter, he asked what province Paul was from, and after the apostle told him he was from Cilicia, he told him he would hear from him after his accusers came, Luke 23:6-12, but until they came, Paul was kept in Herod’s Palace, Acts 23:34-35.

Longenecker, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Some wonder if the men who made the vow of fasting died because they failed in their mission to kill Paul. This was probably not the case. Ancient rabbis allowed for four types of vows to be broken: ‘Vows of incitement, vows of exaggeration, vows made in error, and vows that cannot be fulfilled by reason of constraint’, exclusions allowing for almost any contingency.’

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Vicious criminals would not have been kept in such a palace, and therefore it may be inferred that Paul was honourably treated and given the best accommodations available for a man under detention.’

When we think of God’s providence, we automatically think of Joseph. Remember that Joseph’s brothers thought that they had seen the last of him until there was a severe famine, and they had to go to Egypt for food.

And so after a while, Joseph let himself be known to them, and Joseph says that everything that happened was all a part of God’s plan to get God’s people where God wanted them to be, Genesis 45:4-7.

In the Book of Philemon, the story is told of a slave named Onesimus. He belonged to Philemon of Colossae. Onesimus ran away from his master and made his way to Rome, where he encountered the apostle Paul.

Paul led Onesimus to the truth, and when he writes to Philemon about it, Paul says that everything which happened to Onesimus was all a part of God's plan, **Philemon 15-16**.

Let me give you a quick summary of how Paul saw His life. We have seen that after his third missionary campaign, Paul returned to Jerusalem, where he was arrested for allegedly defiling the temple, **Acts 21:28**.

During the night, the Lord told him to be courageous. He would not die in Jerusalem; rather, he would bear witness in Rome, **Acts 23:11**. And so to save Paul's life from a Jewish mob that had vowed to murder him, Roman officials sent Paul to Caesarea by night according to **Acts 23:31-35**.

And what we are going to see over the next few chapters, Paul was then imprisoned for two years, **Acts 24:27**.

Finally, when Paul concluded that he would get no justice from the authorities, exercising his right as a Roman citizen, he appealed his case to Caesar, **Acts 25:11**.

In early autumn of A.D. 60, he was put on a ship bound for Rome, **Acts 27:1**. And whilst he was on that ship, the ship was wrecked, and all hope of being saved was abandoned, **Acts 27:30**. But an angel appeared to Paul and promised him that 'he must stand before Caesar,' **Acts 27:24**.

The following spring, safe and sound, Paul arrived in Rome, and his prayers and those of the Roman saints had been answered, but through the mysterious workings of divine providence! **Acts 28:16**.

Later, writing from Rome to the brethren in Philippi, the apostle could say that the things which had happened to him 'have really served to advance the gospel,' **Philippians 1:12**.

The point is this, that there is absolutely no doubt that Paul saw the helpful hand of God's providence in this series of events in his life. And so for us, as His people, we should be rejoicing and living each day with a calm confidence that we are in God's hands.

And we, too, just like Joseph, Onesimus, and Paul, should know that the Lord is always near; we should always know that Heaven's operations through providence are a long-lasting presence in our daily existence.

CHAPTER 24

INTRODUCTION

"Five days later, the high priest Ananias went down to Caesarea with some of the elders and a lawyer named Tertullus, and they brought their charges against Paul before the governor. When Paul was called in, Tertullus presented his case before Felix: "We have enjoyed a long period of peace under you, and your foresight has brought about reforms in this nation. Everywhere and in every way, most excellent Felix, we acknowledge this with profound gratitude. But in order not to weary you further, I would request that you be kind enough to hear us briefly." Acts 24:1-4

PAUL'S TRIAL BEFORE FELIX

The apostle Paul's life was being threatened almost every day, and he was passed from pillar to post by the authorities. And although he had times in his life when he thought he would never fulfil his lifetime ambition to go to the greatest nation in the world, which was Rome at that time, to preach the Gospel.

He never lost his grip on the truth; he understood that pain and suffering don't mean that God has left him. Paul learned that God was one step ahead of the game concerning his life, and when God said to him you're going to Rome to preach, he understood that God stands by His promises.

In the previous chapter, we left the apostle Paul in Governor Felix's palace under guard until the Jews arrived to present their case against him, but as we read here, the Jews didn't come alone; they came fully prepared, and to such an extent, they had a very smart lawyer with them.

Luke tells us that after five days, [Acts 24:11](#) / [Acts 21:27](#), the high priest, elders and a lawyer presented themselves before the governor to bring a formal charge against Paul, [Acts 24:1](#). I said this lawyer was smart, and he is. Notice in the text the way Tertullus, [Romans 16:22](#), begins talking to Felix.

He uses flattery with Felix, or what we would say, he sweetens him up by telling him how wonderful he is, [Romans 16:18](#) / [Jude 1:16](#). He refers to the peace that Felix had brought to the land under Roman authority, [Acts 24:2-3](#).

Like all smart lawyers who want people on their side, he doesn't mention a thing about the fact that the governor had been responsible for the murder of the high priest, Jonathan, [Psalm 5:9](#) / [Acts 23:2](#).

Tertullus is very clever in choosing words to get Felix on side, even to the point where he tells Felix that he will state his case briefly, so he doesn't take too much of his time, [Acts 24:4](#). And so he presents his case before Felix.

“We have found this man to be a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world. He is a ringleader of the Nazarene sect and even tried to desecrate the temple; so we seized him. By examining him yourself, you will be able to learn the truth about all these charges we are bringing against him.” The Jews joined in the accusation, asserting that these things were true.” [Acts 24:5-9](#)

Basically, he accused Paul of four things, [Acts 24:5-7](#) / [Luke 23:2](#) / [Luke 23:5](#).

1. They accused him of being a troublemaker.
2. They accused him of stirring up rebellion among the Jews throughout the world.
3. They accused him of being a ringleader of the Nazarene party among the Jews.
4. They accused him of trying to desecrate the temple.

Note [Acts 24:7](#), the footnote says the following.

‘Some manuscripts include him here, and we would have judged him in accordance with our law. But the commander Lysias came and took him from us with much violence, ordering his accusers to come before you.’

And so after hearing all the accusations, the lawyer urges Felix to ‘examine’ Paul, [Acts 24:8](#). What does that mean? No one really knows, but one commentator suggests that examining Paul meant scourging him. In other words, they wanted Felix to beat the truth out of him.

Notice also how clever this lawyer is; he doesn't even mention anything about Paul's Roman citizenship, [Acts 16:37-38](#) / [Acts 22:25-28](#), which meant if they scourge him at this point, Felix would be guilty of breaking the Roman law. He is very selective with the truth. And so the onslaught against Paul continues, but isn't this just amazing? How far will people go to get rid of someone they don't like? [Acts 24:9](#).

People who are very selective with the truth will do anything and say anything to discredit someone. They will go to any lengths to get someone out of the way, especially if you say something against their traditions and practices. Especially if you say something which affects their comfort zones.

These people are happy with their traditions and practices, and they are comfortable with their beliefs. And now this guy named Paul from Tarsus comes along and basically starts rocking their boat a bit.

The truth will always rock our boat, especially if we don't want to hear it. These religious leaders didn't want to hear the truth because the truth hurt them, [Acts 24:9](#).

And so while all these accusations were being presented to Felix, our dear friends, the high priest and elders affirmed the truthfulness of the case presented by their lawyer. But just like in any courtroom session, the judge needs to hear both sides of the story. So Luke continues and tells us about Paul's defence.

“When the governor motioned for him to speak, Paul replied: “I know that for a number of years you have been a judge over this nation; so I gladly make my defence. You can easily verify that no more than twelve days ago, I went up to Jerusalem to worship. My accusers did not find me arguing with anyone at the temple or stirring up a crowd in the synagogues or anywhere else in the city. And they cannot prove to you the charges they are now making against me.” Acts 24:10-13

Remember, even today in our courtrooms, no one is allowed to speak unless the judge says so. And so, as Felix was the judge on this occasion, Paul waited to get permission to speak from him before he began his defence, [Acts 24:10](#). And Paul began his defence by saying that it was a pleasure to be able to state his case before a person who had years of experience in judging matters involving the Jews, [Luke 21:15](#).

Tannehill, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Although Tertullus is supposed to be a skilled orator, Paul demonstrates his superior skill by making use of Tertullus’ words to build his own case.’

Remember that the first accusation against Paul was they accused him of being a troublemaker, [Acts 24:10](#). In defence of that Paul basically says, he had only been back in Judea for twelve days, with the last five of those being spent in custody, [Acts 24:11](#). In other words, Paul would be hard pushed to be a troublemaker in such a short space of time.

Coffman, in his commentary, interprets Paul as saying the following.

‘You are far too intelligent to be taken in by the unsubstantiated charges and wild allegations of the plaintiffs.’

He said they didn't find him in the temple either disputing with others or stirring up the crowd, [Acts 24:12](#). And so, against the accusation of being a rebel against Rome, Paul basically says, he wouldn't have had time for that, and not only that, there is absolutely no proof of that either.

Paul also said they couldn't prove their charge of trying to desecrate the temple either, [Acts 24:13](#) / [Acts 21:26-29](#). Paul was telling the truth, and as we are about to read, he's going to continue to tell the truth, even though he knows his accusers won't like it.

“However, I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that agrees with the Law, and that is written in the Prophets, and I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.” Acts 24:14-16

When they accused him of being a ringleader of the Nazarene party among the Jews, [Acts 24:5](#). Paul didn't hide the fact that he did worship God according to the Way, [Acts 9:2](#) / [Acts 16:17](#) / [Acts 16:25](#) / [Acts 18:26](#) / [Acts 19:9](#) / [Acts 19:23](#) / [Acts 20:4](#) / [Acts 24:14](#) / [Acts 24:2](#), which his Jewish accusers called a sect, [Acts 24:14](#).

If Paul was going to plead guilty to anything, he pleaded guilty to worshipping the God of the Jewish fathers. He pleaded guilty to believing all that was written in the Law of Moses and the prophets, [Acts 24:14](#).

He readily admitted that he based his hope in God, as his accusers also did, who would raise both the righteous and wicked from the dead, [Acts 24:15](#) / [Daniel 12:2](#) / [Matthew 25:31-33](#) / [Matthew 25:46](#) / [John 5:28-29](#) / [Acts 10:42](#) / [Acts 17:31](#) / [Revelation 20:12-15](#).

Remember, Ananias was a Sadducee, and the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection, Acts 23:8. And so, because of that belief, Paul said he tried to live as his conscience directed, so he would not offend God or man, Acts 24:16 / Acts 23:1.

Paul gave them a reason for his hope, he was gentle in his approach, he showed them respect with his words, and he kept a clear conscience as these people were speaking maliciously against him, 1 Peter 3:15-16. Because that's what speaking the truth does, the truth has nothing to hide. Truth exposes falsehood, and as we said, some people don't like that.

God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to die for us and spill His blood for us so that we can be free from a guilty conscience, Hebrews 10:19-23. A person doesn't feel guilty when they have done nothing wrong; it's only when their conscience is pricked that guilt comes along.

Paul did nothing wrong; that's why he had a clear conscience. He lived his life to please God; that's why he had a clear conscience. He didn't rely on himself for it; he relied on the blood of Christ for a clear conscience.

But Paul also understood that a clear conscience didn't make him innocent of sin, 1 Corinthians 4:4 / 1 Peter 2:21. Paul was clear in his mind about who he was and what he was.

"After an absence of several years, I came to Jerusalem to bring my people gifts for the poor and to present offerings. I was ceremonially clean when they found me in the temple courts doing this. There was no crowd with me, nor was I involved in any disturbance." Acts 24:17-18

After some five years in other parts of the world, Paul had returned to Jerusalem with a gift for the needy of the Jewish nation, Acts 24:17 / Galatians 2:10 / Romans 15:26 / 2 Corinthians 8-9.

He says in his defence that he didn't defile the temple, they found him there after he had completed his vow of purification, which again we know as being true, Acts 24:18.

Longenecker, in his commentary, says the following.

'Roman law imposed heavy penalties upon accusers who abandoned their charges (destitutio), and the disappearance of accusers often meant the withdrawal of a charge. Their absence, therefore, suggested that they had nothing against him that would stand up in a Roman court of law.'

"But there are some Jews from the province of Asia, who ought to be here before you and bring charges if they have anything against me. Or these who are here should state what crime they found in me when I stood before the Sanhedrin- unless it was this one thing I shouted as I stood in their presence: 'It is concerning the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you today.'" Acts 24:19-21

Paul suggested that there were some Asian Jews who brought the original charges against him and stirred up the mob, Acts 24:19. He says the very ones who provided the bullets in the first place, should have been present to contest the facts which he presented, Acts 24:19. They are long gone, they simply passed on the bullets for someone else to fire.

These people who are firing are far from innocent, but they weren't the ones who originally began this plot to get rid of Paul. And so Paul exposed what the real accusation was all about; he got to the point even when they wouldn't.

He even invited those Sadducean accusers who were present to step forward and show the error in his one statement before the Sanhedrin, 'concerning the resurrection of the dead I am being judged by you this day', Acts 24:20-21.

Paul knew exactly why he was there, even though they wouldn't admit it.

McGarvey, in his commentary, says the following.

'Paul made this last reference, not because he was conscious of any wrong in the matter, but in order to taunt his Sadducean accusers, and to show Felix that they were moved against him by party jealousy.'

God sent the prophets with a message to His people, but they beat one, killed another, stoned a third, and shot the messengers. God sent His Son with a message for His people, but they killed him, they shot the messenger, Matthew 21:33-39.

They stoned Stephen to death, Acts 7:58-60; they shot the messenger, put James to death with the sword, Acts 12:2, they shot the messenger. Tradition says that Peter was crucified, upside-down on an X-shaped cross, in Rome, and they shot the messenger. The Apostle Paul was tortured and then beheaded by the evil Emperor Nero in Rome in A.D. 67; they shot the messenger.

Today, we are God's messengers, Matthew 28:19-20, and we, too, should not be surprised if people want to shoot us, too. But before we give them a chance to do that, just remind them, 'don't shoot the messenger', we're only telling them what God Himself says they need to know.

“Then Felix, who was well acquainted with the Way, adjourned the proceedings. “ When Lysias the commander comes,” he said, “I will decide your case.” He ordered the centurion to keep Paul under guard but to give him some freedom and permit his friends to take care of his needs.” Acts 24:22-23

People say that a little knowledge can be a dangerous thing, but in this case, we could safely say that a little knowledge can win the day. Luke tells Theophilus that Felix had a fairly good knowledge of the Way, Acts 24:22 / Acts 23:26-30, but just how did he get that knowledge?

If we remember, Philip and his four daughters lived in Caesarea, Acts 21:8-9, and Cornelius had been converted while he was living in the same city, Acts 10:1 / Acts 10:48, so it is possible he had some information about this new religion called Christianity through them. But like any ruler or judge, rather than judging the proceedings immediately, Felix delayed judgment until Lysias came to give his testimony, Acts 24:22.

Walker, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The best methods of court procedure are of less consequence than the right kind of judges.’

We may think that it was good of Felix to allow all the testimonies to be heard first before making any judgment, but there is a strong possibility that he was merely delaying the situation in the hope of receiving a bribe from the Christians, Acts 24:26.

But one thing we do know for sure is that Felix directed the centurion in charge of Paul to grant him basic freedom to be with his friends and have someone attend to his needs, Acts 24:23.

Before we make any judgments about anyone or any situation, we first need to know all the facts; if not, we're nothing less than gossipers, Proverbs 18:8 / Matthew 7:1-5.

“Several days later, Felix came with his wife, Drusilla, who was a Jewess. He sent for Paul and listened to him as he spoke about faith in Christ Jesus. As Paul discoursed on righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, “That's enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you.” At the same time, he was hoping that Paul would offer him a bribe, so he sent for him frequently and talked with him. When two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, but because Felix wanted to grant a favour to the Jews, he left Paul in prison.” Acts 24:24-27

When Felix returned to Caesarea with his third wife, Drusilla, he called for Paul to come to tell him more about 'the faith in Christ,' Acts 24:24.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Drusilla was a sensuously beautiful person, one of the ten descendants of Herod the Great whose names appear in the New Testament, and, like all the Herods, possessed of a character marked by selfishness and profligacy. She was the youngest daughter of Herod Agrippa I, and at this time, 57 or 58 A.D., she was not yet twenty years old. Her brother Agrippa II gave her in marriage to the king of Emesa when she was only fourteen or fifteen years of age.’

Coffman continues in his commentary, and says the following.

‘The young queen was only sixteen when Felix, with the help of Atomos, a Cypriot magician, persuaded her to leave her husband and marry him. She was Felix’s third wife, and they had a son named Agrippa. After the recall of Felix, Drusilla and her only son were perished in the eruption of Vesuvius. She was one of three royal wives taken by Felix. According to the unanimous testimony of the ancients, she was a woman of spectacular beauty.’

Notice Luke mentions that Drusilla was Jewish, [Acts 24:24](#); this may have influenced Felix’s decision to retain Paul in custody, [Acts 24:27](#). Like all of us should be able to do, Paul was ready to give the reason for the hope that he had in Christ Jesus, [1 Peter 3:15](#).

And so he presented the case for righteous living and judgment, along with consideration of the importance of self-control in such living, [Acts 24:25](#) / [John 16:8-11](#).

Stott, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The lax morals of Felix and Drusilla help to explain the topics on which Paul spoke to them.’

Luke records that Paul also warned of the coming judgment, in which every man will be judged based upon his works, [Acts 24:25](#). And that discussion terrified Felix and moved him to send Paul away, saying he would call for him again at a more convenient time, [Acts 24:25](#) / [2 Corinthians 6:2](#).

It’s clear he was also looking for a bribe, [Acts 24:26](#). Jewish historians tell us that Felix did call for Paul to come and converse with him often, secretly hoping to receive a bribe to release him, [Acts 24:26](#).

It appears from our text that after two years of waiting, Felix was relieved by Festus, but Felix left Paul in prison in an effort to earn some special favour from the Jews, [Acts 24:27](#). Historians also tell us that after Felix’s removal from office, Drusilla and their son, Agrippa, perished in the eruption of Vesuvius in AD 79.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘This was to be Paul’s home for two whole years, during which Luke would canvass the cities and villages of Galilee, Judaea, Samaria, etc., preparatory to writing the Gospel of Luke. Perhaps in that work of the incomparable Luke, one may read the purpose of that strange providence which left the greatest of apostles to suffer frustration and delay under the lock and key of Felix. For the benign character of Paul’s imprisonment in Herod’s palace, however, one may be grateful and thankful to the Lord.’

CHAPTER 25

INTRODUCTION

“Three days after arriving in the province, Festus went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem, where the chief priests and Jewish leaders appeared before him and presented the charges against Paul. They urgently requested Festus, as a favour to them, to have Paul transferred to Jerusalem, for they were preparing an ambush to kill him along the way. Festus answered, “Paul is being held at Caesarea, and I myself am going there soon. Let some of your leaders come with me and press charges against the man there, if he has done anything wrong.” Acts 25:1-5

PAUL’S TRIAL BEFORE FESTUS

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘This is the shortest of Paul’s five defences that Luke documented. Paul made his five defences to the Jewish mob on the Antonia Fortress stairway, [Acts 22:1-21](#), to the Sanhedrin, [Acts 23:1-6](#), to Felix, [Acts 24:10-21](#), to Festus, [Acts 25:8](#) / [Acts 25:10-11](#), and to Herod Agrippa II, [Acts 26:1-26](#). This one is quite similar to Paul’s defence before Felix except that now the apostle appealed to the emperor.’

After only three days in the province, Porcius Festus went to Jerusalem, [Acts 25:1](#). It was there that the high priest and some of the members of the Sanhedrin approached him about bringing Paul up to Jerusalem for a trial, [Acts 25:2](#). As we have seen time and time again throughout these last couple of chapters of the Book of Acts, these so-called religious leaders were actually intending to have Paul assassinated along the road, [Acts 25:3](#) / [Acts 23:12-15](#).

Boice, in his commentary, says the following.

‘We see a growth of corruption. In [Acts 23](#), where the plot to murder Paul was first launched, we find that it was the zealots who were responsible. Now, in [Acts 25](#), we find that the leaders are initiating the very thing they were only tangentially involved in earlier.’

But like we’ve also seen, God protected Paul. This is seen in the fact that Festus said that Paul would remain in Caesarea, because he was going there anyway, [Acts 25:4](#). And so, Festus urged those in authority to come present their charges before him there, [Acts 25:5](#).

Isn’t it amazing the lengths these so-called religious leaders are going to, to have Paul killed? They plot and scheme, they lie and bring false accusations. And so Paul once again is called upon to defend his case.

“After spending eight or ten days with them, he went down to Caesarea, and the next day he convened the court and ordered that Paul be brought before him. When Paul appeared, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many serious charges against him, which they could not prove. Then Paul made his defence: “I have done nothing wrong against the law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar.” Acts 25:6-8

Luke says that in eight to ten days, Festus went to Caesarea, sat on the judgment seat, KJV, [Acts 25:6](#) / [Acts 25:10](#) / [Acts 25:17](#) / [Acts 12:21](#) / [Acts 18:12](#) / [Matthew 27:19](#) / [John 19:13](#) / [2 Corinthians 5:10](#), and called for Paul to be brought before him, [Acts 25:6](#).

But the Jews who were on a mission to get rid of Paul once and for all, [Acts 25:5](#), also appeared before the judgment seat and brought serious charges against Paul, but couldn’t prove any of them, [Acts 25:7](#).

Once again, Paul told them clearly that he had not sinned against the Jews, the temple or Caesar, [Acts 25:8](#). This whole situation with Paul is interesting to say the least. Here is a bunch of Jews, led by the elders of the Jews, who didn’t want to know the truth.

They had a mission to get rid of Paul by any means possible, and they are still at it here, because these guys didn’t even ask for a trial. They wanted to skip the trial and go straight to the verdict of guilty.

When the apostle Paul was going around killing Christians, he had a good reputation amongst the Jews and a reputation for being feared by the Christians. But what other people think of us is not as important as what God thinks of us, [Revelation 3:1](#).

Paul had a reputation, and these Jews who were hounding him were holding on to their reputation. They were so religious in all their ways to other people around them, but to Jesus, they were just hypocrites, [Matthew 23:13](#) / [Matthew 23:15](#).

We shouldn’t give people any reason to make any bad judgments about us, whether they have all the facts or not, [1 Peter 2:13-17](#). These Jewish elders were looking for any excuse to get rid of Paul, but he was determined that he wasn’t going to give them one. What happens next is another part of the fulfilment of God’s plan to get Paul to preach the Gospel in Rome.

“Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favour, said to Paul, “Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me there on these charges?” Paul answered: “I am now standing before Caesar’s court, where I ought to be tried. I have not done any wrong to the Jews, as you yourself know very well. If, however, I am guilty of doing anything deserving death, I do not refuse to die. But if the charges brought against me by these Jews are not true, no one has the right to hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar!” After Festus had conferred with his council, he declared: “You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you will go!” Acts 25:9-12

Festus, in an effort to establish good relations with the Jews, asked Paul if he would appear before him in Jerusalem to be judged, [Acts 25:9](#). Paul answered that he had done nothing wrong, as Festus well knew, and as a Roman citizen, would remain before Caesar’s judgment seat, [Acts 25:10](#).

Paul’s honesty and his clear conscience are clearly heard when he says that he was willing to die if he was guilty of some offence worthy of death, but would not be given up to the Jews if innocent, [Acts 25:11](#). So what did Paul do? He appealed to Caesar, [Acts 25:11](#).

Longenecker, in his commentary, says the following.

‘His appeal for a trial in Rome was the right of every Roman citizen who believed he was in danger of violent coercion or capital punishment in a lower court.’

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘At this time Nero was emperor, but in the early years of his rule, A.D. 54-62, he was a relatively admirable emperor, and Paul had no reason to fear him now, A.D. 59. Only after A.D. 62 did Nero begin to rule erratically and to turn against Christianity.’

Festus consulted with his own legal advisors and said Paul would go before Caesar as requested, [Acts 25:12](#). However, because he was innocent, he could have been set free, [Acts 26:32](#). God was working in the background all the way through this to get Paul to where he really wanted to go, [Acts 19:21](#) / [Romans 1:8-15](#).

Paul’s lifetime ambition was to preach the Gospel in the greatest city that the known world knew, Rome, and God was providing a prepaid ticket for him to get that opportunity.

We, too, are on a journey to a great city, but it’s not Rome, it’s heaven, [Hebrews 13:11-14](#). And just as God was using many people to help Paul get to Rome, He uses His church today to help get us and others to heaven. But the only way that is going to happen is when we work together with God and with each other.

Each one of us has work to do, but if we are going to be successful in getting ourselves into that eternal city and take as many people with us as possible, then we all have to work together to achieve that goal, [1 Corinthians 3:6-9](#). God provided help for Paul to eventually get to Rome; God is providing help for us all to get to heaven.

FESTUS CONSULTS KING AGRIPPA

“A few days later, King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea to pay their respects to Festus.” Acts 25:13

Josephus, in his writings, says the following.

‘Agrippa and Bernice evidently visited Festus on this occasion to pay their respects to the new governor of their neighbouring province. Agrippa and Bernice were essentially favourable to the Jews. They both tried to avert the Roman massacre of the Jews in A.D. 66-70.’

The King Agrippa that Luke says came to greet Festus is actually Herod Agrippa II. His father was Herod Agrippa I, [Acts 12:1-23](#), and his great-grandfather was Herod the Great, [Matthew 2:1-18](#). Luke mentions this woman named Bernice, but who was she?

Bernice was Agrippa's sister, and although she was only sixteen years of age, she had already been married twice. First to Alexander of Alexandria and then to her uncle, Herod, King of Chalcis, who died in 48 A.D.

But at the time that Luke records to Theophilus about this event, she was living with her brother. Later, she served as a mistress to both Vespasian and his son Titus, who probably would have married her if there had not been such an outrage among the people.

From a very young age, this woman has been around and seems to have no problem marrying if and when she likes. It appears from our text that it was during Agrippa's stay that Festus brought Paul's case up for consideration.

“Since they were spending many days there, Festus discussed Paul's case with the king. He said: “There is a man here whom Felix left as a prisoner. When I went to Jerusalem, the chief priests and elders of the Jews brought charges against him and asked that he be condemned.” Acts 25:14-15

King Agrippa and Festus spend some time discussing Paul's case, and tells him that he was left by Felix as a prisoner, [Acts 25:14](#) / [Acts 24:27](#).

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following concerning [Acts 24:15](#).

‘This is important as showing that the Jerusalem leaders had demanded a guilty verdict of Festus; and, as Dummelow noted, ‘They desired from the judge partiality, not justice; and they probably offered him money.’

“I told them that it is not the Roman custom to hand over any man before he has faced his accusers and has had an opportunity to defend himself against their charges. When they came here with me, I did not delay the case, but convened the court the next day and ordered the man to be brought in. When his accusers got up to speak, they did not charge him with any of the crimes I had expected. Instead, they had some points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a dead man named Jesus who Paul claimed was alive. I was at a loss how to investigate such matters; so I asked if he would be willing to go to Jerusalem and stand trial there on these charges. When Paul made his appeal to be held over for the Emperor's decision, I ordered him held until I could send him to Caesar.” Acts 25:16-21

These words are basically an account of what has happened so far, but Luke does tell us that Festus said to Agrippa that he told the chief priest and elders of the Jews, [Acts 25:1](#) / [Acts 25:15](#), that Roman law did not normally allow a man to be condemned without having an opportunity to answer his accusers face to face, [Acts 25:16](#).

He says when the Jews came, Festus found no sufficient charge of evil but, as he saw it, it was more of a religious dispute over Paul's affirmation that Jesus had been dead but was now alive, [Acts 25:17-19](#).

Festus goes on and explains that he asked Paul to go to answer the questions in Jerusalem so that he could better understand the question involved, [Acts 25:20-21](#) / [Acts 25:9](#).

But that seems doubtful since he had already told Agrippa he had not found Paul guilty of any of matter involving Roman law. I believe it is more likely that he was seeking to establish a favourable relationship with the Jews, [Acts 25:9](#), when Paul's appeal to Caesar forced him to hold Paul for a higher court, [Acts 25:11-12](#).

PAUL BEFORE AGRIPPA

“Then Agrippa said to Festus, “I would like to hear this man myself.” He replied, “Tomorrow you will hear him.”

The next day, Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp and entered the audience room with the high-ranking officers and the leading men of the city. At the command of Festus, Paul was brought in. Festus said: “King Agrippa,

and all who are present with us, you see this man! The whole Jewish community has petitioned me about him in Jerusalem and here in Caesarea, shouting that he ought not to live any longer. I found he had done nothing deserving of death, but because he made his appeal to the Emperor, I decided to send him to Rome. But I have nothing definite to write to His Majesty about him. Therefore, I have brought him before all of you, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that as a result of this investigation I may have something to write. For I think it is unreasonable to send on a prisoner without specifying the charges against him.” Acts 25:22-27

Agrippa, after listening to Festus, appears to be intrigued and immediately expresses an interest in hearing Paul, which Festus readily granted, [Acts 25:22](#) / [Isaiah 62:2](#) / [Luke 23:6-12](#) / [Acts 9:15](#).

According to our text, the next day, Festus, Agrippa, and Bernice all appeared in very formal attire, with the chief captains and important men of the city all in attendance, [Acts 25:23](#) / [Luke 21:12](#).

Bruce, in his commentary, says the following.

‘All these very important people would have been greatly surprised, and not a little scandalised, could they have foreseen the relative estimates that later generations would form of them and of the prisoner who now stood before them to state his case.’

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Festus used this occasion to honour Agrippa and Bernice before the local Caesarean leaders. There were five commanders based in Caesarea, each with responsibility for 1,000 soldiers. They all had the same authority as Claudius Lysias, the commander of the cohort based in Jerusalem, [Acts 21:31](#) to [Acts 23:30](#) / [Acts 24:22](#). Besides these commanders, many prominent men of the city were present in the auditorium of the governor’s palace.’ Paul was brought in, and Festus introduced him as the man the Jews sought to have put to death in lawsuits brought in Jerusalem, and at Caesarea, [Acts 25:23-24](#) / [Acts 23:12-35](#) / [Acts 25:7](#).

Though Festus announced publicly that he had found no guilt in Paul, [Luke 23:4](#) / [Luke 23:14](#) / [Luke 23:22](#), his actions had forced the apostle to appeal to Caesar, [Acts 25:11-12](#).

It appears as though Paul is going through the different levels of court systems in Biblical times, but even more importantly, God is allowing this to happen. There is a strong possibility that Festus’ hesitation to send Paul straight away to Rome was God’s way of opening up the door to the most powerful court in the world of that day.

But as we just read, Festus needed some charge against Paul; he needed some proof that he did something wrong, [Acts 25:25](#). That’s why he announced he had brought him before Agrippa for an examination, [Acts 25:26](#).

I want to raise a little point about Festus’ actions here, when he says, ‘I have found no guilt in this man,’ [Acts 25:25](#). His actions are so reminiscent of another man’s words who didn’t have the courage to stand up to the pressure of the Jews.

Herod said publicly that Jesus had done nothing wrong, yet he didn’t have the courage to believe in Jesus and live the life of a Christian, [Luke 23:13-15](#). Pilate said publicly that Jesus didn’t do anything wrong, yet he didn’t have the courage to believe in Jesus and live his life as a Christian, [Matthew 27:24](#).

Festus publicly said, Paul hasn’t done anything wrong, but didn’t have the courage to believe Paul concerning Jesus and live the life of a Christian, [Psalm 25:1-3](#). These people were asking the right questions to Paul, but they didn’t get the answers they wanted, which would cause Paul to be guilty.

Festus couldn’t send Paul to Caesar without some sort of case against him, [Acts 25:27](#), or he would look like an idiot, and now Paul is waiting to go into the lion’s den, so to speak. Once again, we find another bad chapter break. To continue with what happens next to Paul, we need to proceed to the next chapter.

CHAPTER 26

INTRODUCTION

“Then Agrippa said to Paul, “You have permission to speak for yourself.” So Paul motioned with his hand and began his defence: “King Agrippa, I consider myself fortunate to stand before you today as I make my defence against all the accusations of the Jews, and especially so because you are well acquainted with all the Jewish customs and controversies. Therefore, I beg you to listen to me patiently. “The Jews all know the way I have lived ever since I was a child, from the beginning of my life in my own country, and also in Jerusalem. They have known me for a long time and can testify, if they are willing, that according to the strictest sect of our religion, I lived as a Pharisee.” Acts 26:1-5

We have seen that the apostle Paul, in his trials and tribulations, has been passed from pillar to post, but he never lost sight of the fact that God was in control of life as long as he remained faithful to the task of witnessing for Christ.

In the previous chapter, we saw how, if any man ever had an excuse to give up on God, Paul would be that man. But he decided not to give up, even when he was being passed around from one legal courtroom to another. God really does know who’s going where, and even though Caesar didn’t know the apostle Paul was coming to Rome, [Acts 23:11](#), God certainly did, [Acts 27:24](#).

Before God gets Paul to Rome, he has some unfinished business in yet another courtroom. In this chapter, we read about Paul continuing to make his defence before King Agrippa.

Remember that Festus had the full authority of Rome behind him, but here Luke tells us that it was Agrippa who told Paul he was permitted to speak, [Acts 26:1](#) / [Luke 21:12-13](#) / [Acts 25:23](#).

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The privilege of addressing a king and the governor was one that Paul appreciated; and, since he had already been cleared of all charges of sinning against Caesar, he could confine himself strictly to things pertaining to the gospel, which things alone were the cause of the hatred he had encountered.’

With an outstretched hand, Paul began by saying he was happy to make his defence before the king, especially because King Agrippa would have been familiar with Jewish teachings and customs, [Acts 26:2-3](#) / [Acts 24:2-4](#) / [Acts 24:10](#).

Paul must have had a long talk in mind, which is the reason he begged the king to be patient, [Acts 26:3](#) / [Acts 24:4](#), and so, he goes on and talks about his citizenship. He reminds the king that though he was born in the city of Tarsus, he was brought up in Jerusalem and was well known among the Jews, [Acts 26:4](#).

In fact, he was so well known amongst the Jews, Paul says, why not ask those who are accusing me today? [Acts 26:5](#). Because the truth of the matter is, some of his accusers may well have remembered the zealous young Pharisee from his school days, [Acts 22:3](#) / [Philippians 3:5-6](#). They would have remembered Saul as he was known back then during his time as a persecutor, [Acts 8:3](#) / [Acts 9:1-2](#) / [1 Corinthians 15:9-10](#).

“And now it is because of my hope in what God has promised our fathers that I am on trial today. This is the promise our twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night. O king, it is because of this hope that the Jews are accusing me. Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?” Acts 26:6-8

Remember earlier, Paul said he was being judged for his hope in the resurrection, [Acts 24:21](#), but here, notice what Paul tells Agrippa he was being judged for. Have the charges been changed without anyone knowing about it? Is Paul changing his argument?

I don't believe he is, I believe that when Paul says, he was now being judged 'for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers' and 'the promise our twelve tribes, [Acts 2:9](#) / [Matthew 19:28](#) / [Luke 2:36](#) / [Luke 22:30](#) / [James 1:1](#) / [Revelation 7:4](#) / [Revelation 21:12](#), are hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night,' [Acts 26:6-7](#).

I believe he is referring to the promised Messiah. And what was the hope that the Messiah would bring with Him? The hope the Messiah brought with Him was the hope of the resurrection of the dead, [Romans 1:4](#).

The Jews had over four hundred years to wait for the very Messiah they were promised. And they missed Him because they were so focused on all the technicalities in looking good, and they forgot to look up. That's why Paul argued that this very hope was sought by all the tribes of Israel. In fact, he said their daily earnest service to God was based upon that very hope.

And Paul couldn't understand this charge because he said it was the very essence of that hope which was the basis of the Jews' accusations against him. They missed the Messiah, and they didn't even understand their own argument. The Jews knew about the Messiah; they knew about the hope they had in the resurrection of the dead, but they forgot the Scriptures applied to them, too.

But not only did the Jews know about God's abilities, but so did King Agrippa. That's why Paul asked him, 'Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?' [Acts 26:8](#) / [Job 19:25-27](#) / [Matthew 19:26](#).

Because Paul asked this specific question, this shows us that his accusers were primarily of the Sadducees, who, if we remember, didn't believe in the resurrection of the dead, [Acts 23:8](#), which is sad, you see. Paul, from looking at his upbringing as a Jew, moves on to his time as a persecutor of the Lord's church.

"I, too, was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests, I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. Many a time, I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. In my obsession against them, I even went to foreign cities to persecute them." [Acts 26:9-11](#)

Paul says he took action to stop the teachings about Jesus and His followers because he was convinced that is what the Lord wanted him to do, [Acts 26:9](#) / [Acts 8:3](#) / [Acts 9:1-2](#) / [1 Corinthians 15:9-10](#).

And so, just as Agrippa's family had pursued an end to the life of Jesus, Paul had pursued an end to the teachings of Jesus. He says that many of those saints were shut up in prison in Jerusalem because of his actions, [Acts 26:10](#).

Wesley, in his commentary, says the following concerning the word 'saints, [Acts 26:10](#).

'Although Paul had avoided calling the Christians 'saints' when he spoke in Jerusalem, here before an unbiased audience, he did so, 'in order to bear witness for Christ and his church.'

And when Paul says, 'when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them,' [Acts 26:10](#) / [Acts 22:20](#). What he is saying here is that as a married man and a member of the Sanhedrin, he voted to condemn them, [Acts 8:1](#) / [1 Corinthians 7:7-9](#).

And as we know, he didn't stop there; he punished them in every synagogue, and he even went to cities outside of Jerusalem in an effort to get them to speak against the name of Jesus, [Acts 26:11](#) / [1 Corinthians 15:9](#) / [1 Timothy 1:15](#).

What Paul is basically saying here is, don't tell me what the Jewish beliefs are, I know them, don't tell me how zealous you have to be against anyone who teaches anything against our forefather's teachings, I was.

Paul says when it came to being a Jew, he was right at the top with the best of them, Philippians 3:5-6. And so, Agrippa must be a patient man as Paul continues with his defence.

“On one of these journeys, I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. About noon, O king, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions. We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ “Then I asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ “‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,’ the Lord replied. ‘ Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’” Acts 26:12-18

In these verses, Paul basically repeats what happened on the road to Damascus, but here he shares the account of his conversion and his purpose for that conversion, Acts 9:5-6 / Acts 22:8 / Acts 22:10.

And to further make his point to Agrippa, he tells him that on his way to Damascus in pursuit of even more Christians, he saw a great light, which was brighter than the sun, coming out of heaven at midday and surrounding him and his companions, Acts 26:12-13.

And after the group fell to the ground, a voice spoke to him in Hebrew, saying, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads,’ Acts 26:14 / Acts 9:3-6.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Goads were sharp sticks used to drive cattle. The figure of kicking against goads was and is a common rural metaphor that describes opposing the inevitable (like ‘banging your head against a wall’). Such action only hurts the one doing it, not the object of his hostility.’

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following concerning ‘kicking against the goads’.

‘This is allegedly a Gentile proverb not in use among the Jews, but there is no reason thus to limit the prevalence of it. Every agricultural country on earth has either this or a similar proverb, and certainly nobody had to explain it to Paul. As the Lord was sending Paul to the Gentile nations, it was appropriate that such a Gentile proverb should have been used.’

Naturally, Paul asked the Voice to identify Himself, and the Voice identified Himself as Jesus of Nazareth, Acts 26:15. This Jesus of Nazareth told him to stand up because He intended for him to minister and witness for Him both as to the things he had seen and would see, Acts 26:16 / Acts 22:14-15.

The Lord went on and promised to protect Paul from harm coming either from the Jews or the Gentiles, to whom he was being sent, which we saw very powerfully last time, Acts 26:17.

And just in case Agrippa wondered what Paul’s purpose was, Paul tells him his purpose was to open their eyes to their own sinfulness, Acts 26:18 / Isaiah 35:5 / Isaiah 42:6-7 / Isaiah 42:16.

To show them the way of receiving forgiveness of sins and the great inheritance available to those set apart by their faith in Jesus, Acts 26:18 / Matthew 28:19-20 / Colossians 1:12-14.

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Paul had gone to Damascus as the apostle, i.e., sent one, of the Sanhedrin. He returned as the apostle of Jesus Christ.’

Paul, as you can imagine, is now in full flow sermon mode and, like all good preachers, he knows when it’s time to get to the point.

“So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds. That is why the Jews seized me in the temple courts and tried to kill me.” Acts 26:19-21

21

Paul could not disobey a voice from heaven, so he preached the Gospel in Damascus and Jerusalem, both to the Jews and Gentiles, [Acts 26:19-20](#). Notice that Paul’s preaching included the necessity of repentance, a turning toward God and living a life showing the works of repentance, [Acts 26:20](#) / [Acts 3:19](#).

We all know the importance of repentance before a person becomes a Christian, [Luke 13:3](#) / [Acts 17:30](#), but please don’t ever think that is the only time we ever need to repent. Christians are a repentant people, and when they sin and confess those sins to God, they need to repent, [2 Corinthians 7:10](#) / [1 John 1:8-10](#).

In other words, repentance produces fruit; repentance is proven by the actions which follow, [2 Corinthians 7:10](#). It’s more than feeling sorry for ourselves; it’s a clear demonstration to God and our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ that we are sorry for our sin.

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following concerning repentance and the believer.

‘The first demand was the demand for repentance, the second demand was the demand for baptism, [Acts 2:38](#) / [Acts 3:19](#), and here are all confirmations of this.’

The minute Paul said the word ‘repentance,’ the Jews got really mad, even to the point of trying to seize him in the temple to kill him, [Acts 26:21](#). But Paul, being the devoted Christian that he was, gave credit where credit was due.

“But I have had God’s help to this very day, and so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen—that the Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles.” Acts 26:22-23

Paul said it was only by God’s help that he was still alive to tell Agrippa that Moses and the prophets had said the Christ would suffer, rise from the dead, and spread the good news among Jews and Gentiles, [Isaiah 42:6](#) / [Isaiah 49:6](#) / [Isaiah 53:10](#) / [Isaiah 60:3](#) / [1 Corinthians 15:3-4](#).

Bock, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The Romans did not believe in the resurrection of the body, just the immortality of the soul, [Acts 17:32](#) / [Acts 25:19](#).’

Paul wasn’t alive speaking to Agrippa because he was an eloquent speaker; he was still alive because God had a purpose for him. He gave credit where credit was due, and that’s why it’s important to thank God today for the life He has given us. And so, after a long time of speaking with the king, Festus has heard enough.

“At this point, Festus interrupted Paul’s defence. “You are out of your mind, Paul!” he shouted. “Your great learning is driving you insane.” “I am not insane, most excellent Festus,” Paul replied. “What I am saying is true and reasonable. The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do.” Acts 26:24-27

Luke tells us that Festus interrupted with a loud declaration that Paul had gone crazy from too much learning, [Acts 26:24](#). But Paul answered that question by simply saying he was not crazy but spoke the truth, and he was reasonable, [Acts 26:24](#).

And from our text, it appears that Paul’s failure to defend himself led him to focus more on trying to convert his judges. The apostle went on to note that the events surrounding and following Jesus’ life were done in the open for all to see, [John 12:19](#), and had been well known to King Agrippa, [Acts 26:26](#).

He then asked Agrippa if he believed the prophets, [Acts 26:27](#). Paul answered for him, perhaps sensing, or through the Spirit knowing, what the King was thinking; of course, he believed the prophets, [Acts 26:27](#).

“Then Agrippa said to Paul, “Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?” Paul replied, “Short time or long-I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains.” Acts 26:28-29

Agrippa recognised that Paul was using a concise argument intended to persuade him to follow Jesus as the Christ, that’s why he asked if Agrippa ‘do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?’ [Acts 26:28](#) / [Acts 11:26](#) / [Acts 26:18](#).

Luke tells us that Paul expressed his true desire that Agrippa, along with everyone else who heard his voice, would be converted to the point of zealously following the Lord, just as he did, [Acts 26:29](#).

That should be the goal of every single Christian: to ask others to become a Christian. Now and then, people will realise this and do one of two things. They will either want to know more, or they will walk away.

That was the choice that Agrippa, Festus, and Bernice had to make. Paul, however, did say that all should become Christians except for the chains he is wearing, [Acts 26:29](#).

Spurgeon, in his commentary, says the following.

‘In front of Agrippa was Paul, a strong man, a noble man, and man of wisdom and character, but a man in chains. Did Agrippa say, ‘Well, if I became a Christian, I might end up in chains like Paul; or at the least, I would have to associate with him. We can’t have that, I’m an important person.’ ‘O that men were wise enough to see that suffering for Christ is honour, that loss for truth is gain, that the truest dignity rests in wearing the chain upon the arm rather than endure the chain upon the soul.’

“The king rose, and with him the governor and Bernice and those sitting with them. They left the room, and while talking with one another, they said, “This man is not doing anything that deserves death or imprisonment.” Agrippa said to Festus, “This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.” Acts 26:30-32

Agrippa, Festus, and Bernice left the room, concluding that Paul had done nothing worthy of death or chains, [Acts 26:30-31](#). In fact, King Agrippa stated that Paul could have been released had it not been for his appeal for the case to be heard by Caesar, [Acts 26:32](#). However, God had plans to get Paul to Rome, [Acts 9:15](#) / [Acts 19:21](#) / [Acts 23:11](#) / [Romans 1:9-13](#).

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘By rising to his feet, Agrippa signalled the end of the hearing. Everyone else rose out of respect for him. Luke implied that everyone present concurred that Paul was completely innocent. This had previously been the verdict of the Pharisees, [Acts 23:9](#), Claudius Lysias, [Acts 23:29](#), and Festus, [Acts 25:25](#). Now Agrippa, a Roman ruler with Jewish blood in his veins who was sympathetic to the Jews, voiced the same opinion, [Acts 26:32](#). In Agrippa’s opinion Paul did not even need to be in prison, much less die for what he had done.’

They left the room, but Paul seized the moment and the seed was sown before they left. These people knew where Paul was brought up, they knew what he was like as a child, they knew what he was like as a Jew, and they knew what he was like before becoming a Christian, and they now know what he is like as a Christian.

CHAPTER 27

INTRODUCTION

“When it was decided that we would sail for Italy, Paul and some other prisoners were handed over to a centurion named Julius, who belonged to the Imperial Regiment. We boarded a ship from Adramyttium about to sail for ports along the coast of the province of Asia, and we put out to sea. Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica, was with us.” Acts 27:1-2

PAUL SAILS FOR ROME

As we have seen over and over again, God has been protecting Paul in order that he gets to Rome, so Festus, along with Agrippa and Bernice, delivered the apostle and some other prisoners into the hands of a centurion named Julius, [Acts 27:1](#).

Ramsay, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Criminals, who were being taken to Rome to amuse by their death in the arena the idle populace, habituated to enjoy such cruel sights. Few people, like Paul, had the distinction of being remitted for trial before the highest court of the Empire.’

God wanted Paul in Rome, [Acts 9:15](#) / [Acts 23:11](#), Paul wanted to be in Rome, [Acts 19:21](#) / [Romans 1:9-13](#), and Agrippa sent him on his way to Rome. Luke noted that Julius was of the Imperial Regiment, [Acts 27:1](#), which basically was a part of the Roman army that belonged to the emperor. And so the ship they boarded headed out to sea from Adramyttium, which is located in northwest Turkey, along with Aristarchus, [Acts 27:2](#).

Ramsey, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Aristarchus, like Luke, seems to have stayed with Paul during his Caesarean imprisonment, [Acts 19:29](#), and travelled with him all the way to Rome, [Colossians 4:10](#) / [Philemon 1:24](#). The presence of these companions with the apostle probably contributed to the respect that Paul received as he travelled.’

It was never a part of God’s plan for mankind to be alone. Paul was not alone; Luke went along on this journey to Italy with him and Aristarchus, who was from Thessalonica in Macedonia, [Acts 27:2](#), but more importantly, the lord was with him, [Matthew 28:20](#).

“The next day we landed at Sidon; and Julius, in kindness to Paul, allowed him to go to his friends so they might provide for his needs. From there, we put out to sea again and passed to the lee of Cyprus because the winds were against us. When we had sailed across the open sea off the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we landed at Myra in Lycia.” Acts 27:3-5

The ship’s first stop was in Sidon, where a man named Julius showed kindness to Paul by allowing him to visit his friends, [Acts 11:19](#), so that they could provide for his needs, [Acts 27:3](#).

They left Sidon, passed the lee of Cyprus, but because of the wind, they changed direction. They then sailed across the open sea off the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia and stopped again at Myra in Lycia, [Acts 27:4-5](#).

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The route to Rome lay in a westerly direction, but the winds coming from almost exactly the direction they wished to go forced them to sail northward.’

Sometimes we have to stop and think about where we need to go and not where we want to go, [John 8:31-32](#).

“There, the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing for Italy and put us on board. We made slow headway for many days and had difficulty arriving off Cnidus. When the wind did not allow us to hold our course, we sailed to the lee of Crete, opposite Salmone. We moved along the coast with difficulty and came to a place called Fair Havens,

near the town of Lasea. Much time had been lost, and sailing had already become dangerous because by now it was after the Day of Atonement.” Acts 27:6-9

The ship Julius found was out of Alexandria and bound for Italy, and so Julius, Paul and the rest of their company boarded that ship, and it set sail against a late summer, north-westerly wind, for the port of Cnidus, [Acts 27:6-7](#). But because the wind was so unfavourable, the captain sailed along the southern shore of Crete, [Acts 27:7](#). When they finally reached the port of Fair Havens, near the city of Lasea, a decision had to be made as to the course to be pursued, [Acts 27:8](#).

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Here they took ‘a breather’ from the contrary winds and held a conference on the advisability of continuing the voyage at that time of the year. This place is now called Kalolomonía.’

Luke tells us that the sailing wasn’t easy, and they lost a lot of time because of the winds. He also tells us that it was after the Day of Atonement, [Acts 27:9](#). All in all, things are going well and according to plan, even though the wind is not in their favour, but as we’re about to read, the apostle Paul could see something different on the horizon; the forecast was not good.

“So Paul warned them, “Men, I can see that our voyage is going to be disastrous and bring great loss to ship and cargo, and to our own lives also.” But the centurion, instead of listening to what Paul said, followed the advice of the pilot and of the owner of the ship. Since the harbour was unsuitable to winter in, the majority decided that we should sail on, hoping to reach Phoenix and winter there. This was a harbour in Crete, facing both southwest and northwest.”
Acts 27:9-12

Paul advised them not to attempt to go any further at such a dangerous time of year, [2 Corinthians 11:25](#). Christians should be aware that the forecast for life will be dangerous at times, [John 16:33](#). Luke tells us that the wind didn’t let up all night; in fact, the violent seas continued the next day, so the sailors began to throw the cargo overboard. Why was this a bad time of year for the ship to make this journey? Luke told us that ‘the Fast’, or ‘Day of Atonement’, was now over, [Acts 27:9](#). The Fast date was probably October 5, which was the date of the Day of Atonement in A.D. 59.

Bruce, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The dangerous season for sailing began about September 14 and lasted until November 11; after the latter date, all navigation on the open sea came to an end until winter was over.’

And if we were the captain of a ship, we should know that the Mediterranean Sea was not a safe place to be, especially for ancient vessels between September 15th and about March 15th.

Paul knew what time of the year it was and noticed also that Paul’s concern was not just for the cargo but also the lives of those people on board the ship, [Acts 27:9-10](#) / [2 Corinthians 11:25](#).

But even with this insight from Paul, Julius was inclined to listen more closely to the words of the ship’s pilot and the owner than to Paul, [Acts 27:11](#). And so the majority of those on board the ship were hoping to reach Phoenix in Crete by winter because its harbour was easier to access, [Acts 27:12](#).

THE STORM

“When a gentle south wind began to blow, they thought they had obtained what they wanted; so they weighed anchor and sailed along the shore of Crete. Before very long, a wind of hurricane force, called the “northeaster,” swept down from the island. The ship was caught by the storm and could not head into the wind; so we gave way to it and were

driven along. As we passed to the lee of a small island called Cauda, we were hardly able to make the lifeboat secure.

When the men had hoisted it aboard, they passed ropes under the ship itself to hold it together. Fearing that they would run aground on the sandbars of Syrtis, they lowered the sea anchor and let the ship be driven along. We took such a violent battering from the storm that the next day they began to throw the cargo overboard.” Acts 27:13-18

When a soft, south wind began to blow, they assumed they could easily reach Phoenix within a day, [Acts 27:12](#). They took the opportunity to move one; they weighed anchor and sailed along the shore of Crete, [Acts 17:13](#).

There’s nothing new about naming hurricane winds, and Luke tells us one called the ‘Northeaster’ on its way towards the ship on which Paul is on board, [Acts 27:14](#). Luke tells us that this ship’s travels were far from ‘plain sailing’; in fact, if they were anything, they were troubled seas, [Acts 27:15](#).

I’m not a sailor, but I know people who are, and they tell me that when you’re out at sea, the weather conditions can literally change in minutes. And that’s what happened here, all of a sudden, a hurricane-force wind, which they called the ‘northeaster’, blew stronger and stronger.

This wind basically ended all hope of reaching a safe harbour as they had to let the ship be driven by the will of the wind, [Acts 27:15](#). When the ship reached the shelter of an island called Cauda, the sailors, with the help of Luke and some other passengers, secured the lifeboat which would have been allowed to trail the ship because they planned to use it to go ashore at Phoenix, [Acts 27:16](#).

And as panic stations set in, the sailors passed cables under the ship to strengthen it against the stormy sea and let the ship drift without the aid of sails for fear of being shipwrecked on the west of Cyrene, which was called Syrtis, [Acts 27:17](#).

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘In modern times, this is called ‘frapping’ a vessel, referring to the passing of cables around the exterior of the hull to give it greater strength and keep it from breaking up during a storm.’

And the wind didn’t let up all night; in fact, the violent seas continued the next day, so the sailors began to throw the cargo overboard, [Acts 27:18](#).

“On the third day, they threw the ship’s tackle overboard with their own hands. When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and the storm continued raging, we finally gave up all hope of being saved. After the men had gone a long time without food, Paul stood up before them and said: “Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete; then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss.” Acts 27:19-21

Luke tells us on the third day they threw the tackle overboard as well, [Acts 27:19](#). Remember, they could not see the sun or stars, which meant navigation was impossible, and with no navigation comes no hope of being saved, [Acts 27:20](#).

When the forecast for life is not looking good, and we feel like we’ve lost our way because of the dangers which lie ahead, don’t give up hope. Don’t give up and cut yourself off from God and His people because in the eternal forecast of life, our suffering is only for a ‘little while,’ [1 Peter 1:6-8](#). And that hope of eternity with God is not a fairy dream; it’s real and alive, that’s why it’s called a living hope, [1 Peter 3:1](#).

Luke tells Theophilus that after going some time without any food, which means everyone will be weak, Paul told them it was coming, but they didn’t listen and so Paul reminds them of his earlier warning, [Acts 17:21](#). The reason he reminds them is not to say, ‘I told you so’, but to give more credibility to what he was going to say next.

“But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed. Last night, an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me and said, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.’ So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me. Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island.” Acts 27:22-26

Paul said I know life's forecast is tough right now, and the ship is going to run aground on an island and be lost, [Acts 17:22](#). But God, through an angel, had promised to answer my prayers by saving every single life on board this ship, [Acts 17:23-24](#).

The angel told Paul to be courageous because he has to stand trial before Caesar, [Acts 27:24](#) / [Acts 23:11](#) / [Acts 26:16](#). The angel also tells him that God has graciously given Paul the lives of all who sail with him,' [Acts 27:24](#). Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'There are a number of similarities in this narrative to what is said in Jonah. In that storm, the sailors threw the ship's wares overboard, [Jonah 1:5](#), and Jonah confessed that he feared God, [Jonah 1:9](#).'

Paul then encourages everyone on board, and he is absolutely confident that everything will happen just as the angel told him, [Acts 27:25](#) / [Acts 27:22](#). However, they must run aground on some island, [Acts 27:26](#).

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

'The prisoner had become the captain, for he is the only man with any courage left.'

When life's forecast is for rough waters ahead, we also need to remember that God will answer our prayers, [Psalm 61:1-3](#) / [James 1:6-8](#). Life is tough, but don't stop praying because there is always hope. Most people on board this ship saw no hope, but Paul gave them hope, [Job 13:15](#).

THE SHIPWRECK

"On the fourteenth night, we were still being driven across the Adriatic Sea, when about midnight the sailors sensed they were approaching land. They took soundings and found that the water was a hundred and twenty feet deep. A short time later, they took soundings again and found it was ninety feet deep. Fearing that we would be dashed against the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern and prayed for daylight. In an attempt to escape from the ship, the sailors let the lifeboat down into the sea, pretending they were going to lower some anchors from the bow. Then Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay with the ship, you cannot be saved." So the soldiers cut the ropes that held the lifeboat and let it fall away." [Acts 27:27-32](#)

On the fourteenth night, as they were tossed about in the Adriatic Sea, the sailors sensed they were coming close to land, [Acts 27:27](#). And as all old ships did to find out how close to land they were, they took soundings, [Acts 27:28](#). Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

'Took soundings' is literally 'hearing the land' in Greek. To determine the depth of the water, the sailors tied a weight to a line and threw it overboard. The depth to which it sank indicated the depth of the water. A fathom is 6 feet, so these depths were 120 and 90 feet.'

When they realised they might hit some rocks, they cast four anchors off the stern and prayed for daylight, [Acts 27:29](#) / [Jonah 1:14](#). The sailors, in an effort to save themselves, let down the lifeboat and pretended to put out more anchors, [Acts 27:30](#).

This didn't go unnoticed. Paul saw what they were doing and warned Julius that he could not be saved without the sailors on board, [Acts 27:31](#). Now, finally, they begin to believe Paul's words, and the centurion commands his soldiers to cut away the ropes to the lifeboat and let it fall away, [Acts 27:32](#).

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'The unbelief of the sailors is seen in their refusal to accept Paul's assurance that no lives would be lost; but, by this time, the centurion and the soldiers had far too much respect for Paul's words to ignore the warning given here. They promptly cut the ropes, setting the dinghy free in the raging sea.'

Paul knew, even though the soldiers didn't, that they had to cut away the ropes to the lifeboat and let it fall away to save their own lives. And so after meeting their spiritual needs by giving them hope, Paul turns his attention to their physical needs.

“Just before dawn, Paul urged them all to eat. “For the last fourteen days,” he said, “you have been in constant suspense and have gone without food—you haven't eaten anything. Now I urge you to take some food. You need it to survive. Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head.” After he said this, he took some bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all. Then he broke it and began to eat. They were all encouraged and ate some food themselves. Altogether, there were 276 of us on board. When they had eaten as much as they wanted, they lightened the ship by throwing the grain into the sea.” Acts 27:33-38

Paul urged everyone on board the ship to eat since they hadn't eaten for fourteen days, [Acts 27:33](#). And then reassures them again by telling them that not one hair on their heads would be harmed, [Acts 27:34](#). And so while they all watched, Paul took some bread, gave thanks to God in prayer, [1 Timothy 4:4-5](#), and began to eat, [Acts 27:35](#). And when all two hundred and seventy-six onboard ate, they were encouraged and cast the rest of the grain overboard, [Acts 27:36-38](#).

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

‘It could never be said of Paul as it was said of some people that ‘they were so heavenly minded that they were of no earthly use.’ He knew that hungry men are not efficient men; and so he gathered the ship's company around him and made them eat.’

When life's forecast is not looking good, not only should we remember we're not alone on our journey, not only should we remember we will have many stops in life, not only should we be aware that life can be dangerous at times. Not only do we need to remember that God will answer our prayers, but we also need to remember that God will look after our needs, [Philippians 4:19](#).

“When daylight came, they did not recognise the land, but they saw a bay with a sandy beach, where they decided to run the ship aground if they could. Cutting loose the anchors, they left them in the sea and at the same time untied the ropes that held the rudders. Then they hoisted the foresail to the wind and made for the beach. But the ship struck a sandbar and ran aground. The bow stuck fast and would not move, and the stern was broken to pieces by the pounding of the surf.” Acts 27:39-41

Luke continues to tell us about Paul's adventures on this ship. As day broke, it became clear why Paul had said the sailors needed to stay on board, [Acts 27:31](#). Although they did not recognise the land which stood nearby, they did know to guide the ship toward a bay with a beach that they could see, [Acts 27:39](#).

Bruce, in his commentary, says the following.

‘If they missed Malta, there would have been nothing for it but to hold on for 200 miles until they struck the Tunisian coast, and no one could have expected the ship to survive that long.’

It's then that they had to let go of the anchors, cut loose the rudders' ropes and hoist the mainsail, [Acts 27:40](#) / [Acts 27:18](#). People need to cut the cords with this world to get to heaven, [1 John 2:15](#); these sailors have to cut themselves loose to get to a safer place.

Just before the ship reached shore, it stuck fast in a sandbar formed by the swirling waters caused by the merging of two seas, [Acts 27:41](#). The bow stuck fast, but the stern began to break apart in the rough seas, [Acts 27:41](#).

“The soldiers planned to kill the prisoners to prevent any of them from swimming away and escaping. But the centurion wanted to spare Paul's life and kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and get to land. The rest were to get there on planks or on pieces of the ship. In this way, everyone reached land in safety.” Acts 27:42-44

The soldiers didn't want to be held accountable for anyone who might escape, [Acts 12:19](#) / [Acts 16:27](#); that's why they wanted to kill them, [Acts 27:42](#).

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'This was the old Roman code, that the custodian of a prisoner should answer with his life for any who escaped; and the present emergency suggested to the soldiers that it would be better to kill the prisoners than to risk any of them getting away. Their heartless suggestion shows how little they regarded the providential escape from death which had already come to themselves.'

The soldiers wanted to kill the prisoners so that none could escape, but God, working through the centurion Julius, wanted to save Paul, so he forbade this course of action, [Acts 27:43](#) / [Acts 27:24](#).

Instead, anyone who could swim was told to make their way to shore, while the others who couldn't swim used boards and broken pieces of the ship to help them float ashore, [Acts 27:43-44](#).

This is all about trust, [Psalm 56:3](#) / [Luke 8:22-25](#). These sailors forgot what Paul had told them earlier, [Acts 27:23-26](#); they had forgotten God's promise because they didn't trust God as Paul did.

If they listened and believed, they wouldn't have panicked like they are doing now. If they believed, they would have realised that what Paul said to them earlier was true. Paul told them that the ship would have to run aground, and he told them just as God's angel had promised, not a single life would be lost, [Acts 27:23-24](#).

CHAPTER 28

INTRODUCTION

"Once safely on shore, we found out that the island was called Malta. The islanders showed us unusual kindness. They built a fire and welcomed us all because it was raining and cold. Paul gathered a pile of brushwood and, as he put it on the fire, a viper, driven out by the heat, fastened itself on his hand. When the islanders saw the snake hanging from his hand, they said to each other, "This man must be a murderer; for though he escaped from the sea, Justice has not allowed him to live." But Paul shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no ill effects. The people expected him to swell up or suddenly fall dead, but after waiting a long time and seeing nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and said he was a god." Acts 28:1-6

PAUL ASHORE ON MALTA

In the previous chapter, we read that God kept His promise, and not a single soul was lost. Luke now tells us that they soon discovered the island's name was Malta, [Acts 28:1](#).

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

'Malta lies about 60 miles south of the island of Sicily. It is about 18 miles long and 8 miles wide. It is also about 500 miles west of Crete and 180 miles northwest of Africa. People of Phoenician origin inhabited it in Paul's day.'

The natives, who were descendants of Phoenicia, did not speak Greek, but they did show considerable kindness to those recently shipwrecked, [Acts 28:2](#).

Harrison, in his commentary, says the following.

‘They spoke a language derived from Phoenician, and were little affected by the Greek-Roman culture.’

Luke tells us that while Paul helped gather sticks to lay on the fire they had built, a viper, who was feeling the heat of the fire, latched onto the apostle’s arm but Paul shook it off into the fire, [Acts 28:3](#).

Notice the snake didn’t move until it felt the heat, and as Christians, we won’t move and grow unless we allow God to apply that heat in our lives, [Job 23:10](#) / [1 Peter 1:7](#) / [1 Peter 4:12-13](#).

These very superstitious islanders believed he must truly have been guilty of something. They say he was a murderer, he survived the sea, and the goddess Justice has not allowed him to live, [Acts 28:4](#). They obviously thought Paul was going to die from the snakebite, [Acts 28:6](#).

However, Paul had no effects from the snake bite, [Acts 28:5](#), no swelling, no sudden death. After waiting some time, they realised Paul was still alive and well, with nothing unusual happening to him; they concluded that he must be a god, [Acts 28:6](#) / [Acts 14:8-18](#).

Robertson, in his commentary, says the following.

‘These people thought that calamity was proof of guilt, poor philosophy and worse theology.’

God delivered Paul from the prisons, He delivered him from the courtrooms, He delivered him from the shipwreck, and He has delivered him again from the hands of a snake bite, [Mark 16:18](#) / [Luke 10:19](#).

I’ve said this many times, but we really need to understand the point. God gave Paul a purpose, and one of those purposes was for Paul to preach in Rome, [Acts 9:15](#) / [Acts 19:21](#) / [Acts 23:11](#) / [Romans 1:9-13](#), and no one and nothing, not even a snake, was going to prevent that from happening.

“There was an estate nearby that belonged to Publius, the chief official of the island. He welcomed us to his home and, for three days, entertained us hospitably. His father was sick in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery. Paul went in to see him and, after prayer, placed his hands on him and healed him. When this happened, the rest of the sick on the island came and were cured. They honoured us in many ways, and when we were ready to sail, they furnished us with the supplies we needed.” [Acts 28:7-10](#)

Luke tells us that the centurion and the ship’s officers, along with Paul and his company, were invited to stay at the house of the chief man of the island, whose name was Publius, [Acts 28:7](#).

MacGregor, in his commentary, says the following regarding Publius.

‘This exact word has been found in two inscriptions as a title of an official in Malta.’

He entertained them for three days, during which time Paul healed Publius’ father of a fever and dysentery by praying and laying his hands on him, [Acts 28:8](#).

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘This is the only instance in Acts of the combination of praying and laying on hands in a miracle story.’

If anybody today could genuinely perform a miracle like this, then the reaction to that miracle would be the same as Paul’s. Others who were sick were also brought to the apostle, and he healed them, [Acts 28:9](#).

Remember, Luke is a doctor, and when he records people were healed, we can be sure they were, [Luke 4:38-40](#) / [Colossians 4:14](#). No wonder they bestowed the honour on Paul while he was with them and sent the whole company on their way with adequate provisions, [Acts 28:10](#).

PAUL’S ARRIVAL IN ROME

“After three months, we put out to sea in a ship that had wintered in the island. It was an Alexandrian ship with the figurehead of the twin gods Castor and Pollux. We put in at Syracuse and stayed there three days. From there, we set sail and arrived at Rhegium. The next day, the south wind came up, and on the following day, we reached Puteoli. There, we found some brothers who invited us to spend a week with them. And so we came to Rome. The brothers there had heard that we were coming, and they travelled as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns to meet us. At the sight of these men, Paul thanked God and was encouraged. When we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him.” Acts 28:11-16

Luke informs Theophilus that they set sail aboard another Alexandrian ship with the figurehead of the twin gods Castor and Pollux, after three months, [Acts 28:11](#). This was likely after the worst of the winter storms were over. Coffman, in his commentary, says the following about the twin gods.

‘The Greek word here is ‘the Dioscuri,’ the mythical twin sons of Jupiter, pagan deities also called Castor and Pollux, and honoured especially by sailors. The constellation Gemini is named for them, being one of the twelve sectors of the sky identified with the signs of the zodiac.’

Their first stop was at Syracuse, where they stayed for three days, [Acts 28:12](#). Then they sailed to Rhegium and, finally, Puteoli, [Acts 28:13](#).

DeWalt, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Just eight miles Northwest of Naples, it was the greatest port in Italy. The large pier had twenty-five arches, of which thirteen ruined ones remain.’

Puteoli was the main port of call for ships carrying wheat from Egypt to Rome, and it was there they found brethren and stayed with them for seven days, then they went on to Rome.

Trenchard, in his commentary, says the following.

‘A delay of seven days would enable him (Julius) to equip himself and his men, after the loss of everything in the wreck, before entering Rome.’

When someone like the apostle Paul is heading for a place like Rome, word gets around, and brethren from the city, some of whom travelled forty three miles to greet him at the Market of Appius, and others met him at the Three Taverns, [Acts 28:14-15](#). This was around forty-three miles from Rome.

Look at Paul’s reaction to this meeting of the saints. When he saw them all, he thanked God, and they gave him the courage to go on, [Acts 28:15](#) / [Romans 12:6-8](#) / [Romans 15:22-29](#).

There are two lots of good news happening at this moment. First of all, we see that Julius the centurion was successful in bringing all of the prisoners to Rome, [Acts 28:14](#) / [Acts 27:1](#). Secondly, Paul has finally reached his destination, [Acts 28:14](#) / [Acts 9:15](#) / [Acts 19:21](#) / [Acts 23:11](#) / [Romans 1:9-13](#).

While he was in Rome, he was permitted to live with a guard by himself, [Acts 28:16](#) / [Philippians 1:13](#), in his own rented home, [Acts 28:30](#). This was a great moment for Paul and the saints in Rome.

Boice, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Now, at the very end of the book, the apostle comes to Rome. Thus Jesus’ prophecy that his disciples would be his witnesses ‘to the ends of the earth’ is fulfilled,’ [Matthew 28:19-20](#) / [Mark 16:15-16](#) / [Acts 1:8](#).’

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘This is the end of the last ‘we’ section of Acts, [Acts 16:10-40](#) / [Acts 20:5](#) to [Acts 21:18](#) / [Acts 27:1](#) to [Acts 28:16](#).

We know that Luke and Aristarchus remained with Paul for some time, and Paul had other visitors, including Timothy, Tychicus, and Epaphroditus. Luke and Aristarchus were with him when Paul wrote his epistles to Philemon and to the Colossians, [Philemon 1:24](#) / [Colossians 4:14](#), which he composed during his detention in Rome.’

PAUL PREACHES AT ROME UNDER GUARD

“Three days later, he called together the leaders of the Jews. When they had assembled, Paul said to them: “My brothers, although I have done nothing against our people or against the customs of our ancestors, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans. They examined me and wanted to release me, because I was not guilty of any crime deserving death. But when the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar, not that I had any charge to bring against my own people. For this reason, I have asked to see you and talk with you. It is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain.” Acts 28:17-20

After three days in Rome, Paul called for the leaders of the Jews, Romans 1:16, and he explained to them that he was in Rome because of charges brought against him by their brethren in Jerusalem, Acts 28:17.

He tells them that the authorities had wanted to release him, but he had to appeal to Caesar because the Jews were opposed to Paul being at liberty, Acts 28:18-19.

McGarvey, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Paul remained chained day and night, the guard being changed according to uniform custom every three hours, unless an exception was made of the sleeping hours in this case.’

Paul says the reason he’s in chains is that he is a Christian, he is someone who wholeheartedly follows Christ, Acts 28:20. Because he knows and fully understands that Jesus Christ was and is the true fulfilment of Israel’s hope, Acts 28:20. In other words, Jesus is the Messiah, Acts 3:22-24 / John 4:25-26.

All the way through the Old Testament, there are many prophecies concerning this coming Messiah. The Jews and the Samaritans were waiting for the arrival of the Christ, John 1:41 / John 1:45 / Luke 2:25 / Luke 2:38. Even the enemies of Jesus recognised the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament, Matthew 2:4-6 / Matthew 26:63-64 / John 7:42 / Acts 26:27.

“They replied, “We have not received any letters from Judea concerning you, and none of the brothers who have come from there has reported or said anything bad about you. But we want to hear what your views are, for we know that people everywhere are talking against this sect.” Acts 28:21-22

It appears from our text that the leaders of the Jews in Rome knew nothing of the charges against Paul and reported that no one had come from Jerusalem, Acts 28:21.

Since Paul’s accusers were Jews and the people he is speaking to here are Jews, we would think that such a serious charge against Paul would be known by most Jews.

These guys hadn’t heard anything bad about Paul; in fact, they were more interested in hearing more about this Christianity that everyone, everywhere is speaking against, Acts 28:22.

MacGregor, in his commentary, says the following.

‘There is some evidence that if the prosecution failed to put in an appearance within two years, they lost their case by default.’

“They arranged to meet Paul on a certain day and came in even larger numbers to the place where he was staying. From morning till evening, he explained and declared to them the kingdom of God and tried to convince them about Jesus from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. Some were convinced by what he said, but others would not believe.” Acts 28:23-24

On the appointed day, a large group returned and Paul preached all day and he preached all day using Moses and the prophets to testify concerning God’s kingdom, Acts 28:23.

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Is there any example of undefeatable hope and unconquerable love like this act of Paul when, in Rome too, he preached first to the Jews?’

The apostle Paul used the Old Testament to convince the Jews and Gentiles that Jesus was the Messiah, and we should be doing the same thing, Romans 15:4 / 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

But as we have seen time and time again through the Book of Acts, the group was divided as to whether to believe Paul or not, Acts 28:24 / 2 Corinthians 2:15-16. But just before they go, Paul has one more statement to make, again using the Old Testament as his proof.

“They disagreed among themselves and began to leave after Paul had made this final statement: “The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your forefathers when he said through Isaiah the prophet: “Go to this people and say, “You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.” For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.” Acts 28:25-27

As they were disagreeing with themselves, 2 Corinthians 2:16, and about to leave, Paul quoted from Isaiah 6:9–10, Acts 28:25-27. Why? To show that their rejection of the Gospel had been foretold by the Holy Spirit, Acts 28:25-27 / Matthew 13:14-15 / Mark 4:12 / Luke 8:10 / John 12:40-41.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following concerning Isaiah’s prophecy.

‘This same passage was applied to Israel by Christ, as affirmed in all four gospels, Matthew 13:15 / Matthew 13:15 / Mark 4:12 / Luke 8:10 / John 12:37-41. The significance of its being repeated here lies in the fact that the same blindness that closed the hearts of Israel to the Christ was still operative in closing their hearts against the gospel.’

This is still a major problem for many people today; they read and listen to the Bible, but they fail to understand it. They see Christians coming together every week and living their lives fully devoted to God, but they can’t perceive that commitment.

And why don’t they understand? Why can’t they perceive? Well, simply because their hearts have become hardened. In other words, we must leave our own ideas behind, forget about what the world says and turn to Jesus in repentance, and He will heal us from the disease of sin, Acts 28:25-27 / Isaiah 6:9–10.

“Therefore, I want you to know that God’s salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!” Acts 28:28

Paul tells them that salvation would be taken to the Gentiles, and they will listen, Acts 28:28 / Acts 13:46-52 / Acts 18:6 / Romans 1:16. Being a Christian is more than just coming to Jesus; it’s more than just hearing His words, Matthew 7:21-27. It’s about obeying His words and practising what Jesus preached.

The footnote for Acts 28:29 says the following.

‘Some manuscripts include here, after he said this, the Jews left, arguing vigorously among themselves.’

Paul is finished speaking with the Jews, but he is far from finished when it comes to preaching the Gospel.

“For two whole years, Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. Boldly and without hindrance, he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.” Acts 28:30-31

Paul spent two years in his own rented house, Acts 28:30, probably paying for it through tent-making, Acts 18:1-2 / Acts 20:33-35. It was from this rented house that Paul would write letters to the Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon.

He received guests, Philippians 1:12, probably including Onesimus, Philemon 1:10. He taught many people concerning the kingdom of God, and he spoke boldly, and no one forbade him to continue, Acts 28:31.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘From 62 to 65 A.D., Paul was a free man, visiting Crete and points around the Aegean Sea, [Titus 1:5](#) / [2 Timothy 4:13](#) / [2 Timothy 4:20](#), possibly even fulfilling his desire to go to Spain, [Romans 15:24](#).’

I’m sure the church would have grown rapidly at this time, because of Paul’s teaching as it did in times before, [Acts 2:47](#) / [Acts 6:7](#) / [Acts 9:31](#) / [Acts 12:24](#) / [Acts 16:5](#) / [Acts 19:20](#). He finally made it, and his ambition to preach the Gospel in the greatest city known to mankind was fulfilled thanks to the grace of God.

We’re not told if Paul ever did appear before Caesar Nero, but because God promised he would, [Acts 9:15](#) / [Acts 23:11](#), there is no reason to believe otherwise. And as the Book of Acts began with Luke writing about Jesus, [Acts 1:1](#), Luke ends his report to Theophilus by writing about Jesus, [Acts 28:31](#).