

*The Acts*  
OF THE  
*Apostles*



*16<sup>th</sup> Annual*

West Virginia School of Preaching  
Victory Lectures

**October 24-28, 2010**

*The Acts*  
of the  
*The Apostles*

16<sup>th</sup> Annual  
**West Virginia School of Preaching**  
Victory Lectures

*Hosted by:*  
Hillview Terrace  
Church of Christ  
Moundsville, West Virginia

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## Foreword

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Why this book? A Christian recently said, “I don’t know why colleges and schools of preaching make all these lectureship books. They are nothing but a lot of hard work and a waste of money. Nobody reads them anyway.” At first the statements were a little stinging and hurt just a bit, but during the ensuing months much more thought has been given to the comment. There are elements of truth in this observation. First, there are many of these types of books produced. Almost every lectureship of every college and/or preaching school is recorded in print. Secondly, there is a lot of hard work put into the production of them, of that there is no doubt. Thirdly, whether they are a waste of money is problematic, for no great profit is made for the school. Only about \$2.50 per book sold. If they are never read, money has been wasted, that is true. Fourthly, the observation that they are seldom read may be more truth than poetry. Many, perhaps hundreds gather dust on shelves all over the world, yet they are there if needed. Books are often like band aids—only used when needed. Therefore, again it must be asked, “why this book?”

Books have great longevity. One can read books today that were produced nearly three hundred years ago and be astounded by how history revolves and how, in religion at least, the same false positions are taken and same false arguments are made. Books, though not produced easily, stay with us a very long time and are the products of some of the ripest thinkers in the world. To allow them only to decorate a shelf is certainly a waste of a good investment.

However, beyond this, there are more profound reasons. In a book such as this one, one finds the collective study results of thirty or more men, some of whom have been studying their Bible hungrily for a half century or longer. When they put the result of their research and careful analysis to paper we have thoughts that may never be thought again, but they are now recorded for years to benefit untold generations who are seeking answers to questions on these subjects. Youth, though these are not found on an ipod can

carefully examine them, and have their faith either built or reinforced. For a school of any type to record the thinking and preaching found in “the lectures” is a boon to the future. Here you will find some of the best thinking of some of the greatest men who never knew they were great.

Life is a terminal experience and no one knows when it will terminate. Here may be written some of the last thoughts that some of the speakers and writers will record on their subject. We have a part of their minds and hearts with us for generations. When they are gone and largely forgotten their work will linger like a haunting melody to bless the lives of who knows how many thousands. While it may be true that few sit down now and read them cover to cover, these books act as some of the best reference material given at the height of the productivity of those who wrote them. Hence, for all these reasons and dozens more that could be recorded these books are produced by this school.

Expressions of appreciation are in order, though not expressed in any particular order. We thank our printer Gospel Light of Delight, AR, for a beautiful job very well done. Thanks goes to Lyn Miller without whose abilities as a composer of books this one would never have come off the press. Gratitude is expressed to Kelley Pettit, Betty Fogle, Susan Kelch, Dana Simons, Christie Robison, Elizabeth Robison, Lisa Games, and Shirley West for all the hard work in proofing and correcting such things as split infinitives and dangling participles as well as punctuation. Deep appreciation is offered to all those men who worked so hard to produce the lectures herein recorded, with extra thanks for those who got them in on time! They are giants in the faith. Thanks is expressed to the lectureship committee for their planning and selecting themes, subjects and speakers, and to brother Denver Cooper for making all the contacts necessary for both the speeches and the written lectures. His task is herculean! Most of all we thank our God and Father and His Son Jesus Christ for allowing us the privilege to serve in His immovable kingdom.

*D. Gene West  
14 July 2010*

## *Dedication*

Following a tradition of several years, this year’s West Virginia School of Preaching Victory Lectureship Book is dedicated to brother Don Cooper. It is both a pleasure and privilege to dedicate this book to one who has had such a great impact on the cause of Christ in our area.

He was born and reared in Parkersburg, WV, the youngest child of Jesse R. and Sarah Cooper. He was baptized into Christ by C. D. Plum July 19, 1944, at Lynn Street Church of Christ in Parkersburg where his father served as a deacon. He, along with his brother Denver, was encouraged by godly parents to preach the Gospel of Christ. His father served the North End Church of Christ for many years as one of her pastors and his mother was very active in the congregation carrying out many duties particularly suited to Christian women. In 1944 Don and his parents became charter members of North End Church of Christ and his father was selected as one of the elders. He began his preaching career by giving short talks on Wednesday evening, a tradition among churches of Christ.

Don graduated Freed-Hardeman College (University) and began doing “week end preaching” for churches in Barbour County, WV. At Mt. Liberty, near Philippi, WV, he met his future wife Jan Jones. She was a fine young Christian lady having been baptized into Christ by Fred E. Dennis, noted evangelist for Ohio Valley churches. The Coopers were married in the spring of 1954, and just a week later they began working with the Church of Christ in Washington, PA.

During his preaching career of fifty-six years, he has also served as evangelist for churches in Ashland, Toronto, Mansfield, Reynoldsburg, Wadsworth, and LaGrange, Ohio. He preached for Hillview Terrace Church of Christ in Moundsville, WV, the Westside and Eastside churches in Baltimore, MD, and at present is serving Brookwood Way Church of Christ in Mansfield, OH. He also served the Wadsworth, OH, church as one of her elders.

Cooper has also served churches by holding gospel meetings, conducting singing schools. He helped to establish churches and helped in the founding of one Christian youth camp. He has served as a radio and television evangelist, written articles for several Christian journals and speaks on area lectureships. He has taken up the gauntlet in debate, his service through the years has been varied and effective.

Don has enjoyed close association with many preachers through the years, but none more than that of his brother Denver who has preached sixty-eight years and now directs West Virginia School of Preaching. He has enjoyed the friendship and influence of the late R. C. Oliver renowned preacher in Michigan, the Ohio Valley, and West Tennessee.

One of his favorite Bible texts is Romans 10:13-15, especially verse fifteen which stresses the importance of preaching the gospel of Christ. Another is Proverbs 31:10 which teaches the importance of choosing the right mate. He has been lovingly supported and encouraged by Jan, his wife of fifty-six years. Their family includes four children, five grandchildren, three great-grandchildren with a set of twins expected by year's end. All who are of accountable age are faithful and loyal servants in the body of Christ.

To this man and his family we take great pleasure in dedicating this volume of the Victory Lectures featuring a study of the Book of Acts. May the blessings of God be with them. May their years of service be increased according to the will of God.

*D. Gene West*

## *Eldership Honored* *New Philadelphia Church of Christ*

It has become a tradition at West Virginia School of Preaching to dedicate our Lectureship Book each year to elders and a preacher. To elders because of their years of hard work in guiding the flock of God over which the Holy Spirit has made them overseers, and to a preacher who has labored many years in the kingdom of Christ in the greater Ohio Valley. This year will be no exception, the tradition continues!

This year's book is dedicated to the fine elders of the New Philadelphia Church of Christ. The Holy Spirit delivered a solemn and serious charge through His apostle Paul when he told the elders of ancient Ephesus, "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28). The men to whom this book is dedicated understand that charge, take it seriously and work diligently to keep it. Therefore, it is a pleasure to render honor to whom honor is due by dedicating the book this year to:

**Jerry Dawson.** Jerry was born July 7, 1945, to Clarence and Mildred Dawson. Brother Dawson obeyed the Gospel of Jesus Christ in 1963, and in 1968 he married Linda McElwee. To their union was born two fine children, a son Todd and a daughter Julie. The Dawsons are grandparents of five grandchildren. Jerry was employed for 38 years as a teacher and coach, retiring in 2005. In 1994 he was selected by the New Philadelphia Church as one of her Pastors and he still fills that responsibility. He is a gifted Bible teacher and personal worker. Many souls have come to Christ through his efforts.

**Dean Dummermuth.** Dean is the son of Ralph and Viola Dummermuth. He was born February 8, 1933. In 1954 he married Wilma Canfield and they are the parents of three fine children, Sherri, Terri and Tim. They are grandparents to four and great-grandparents to one, as their family has grown through the years. Brother Dummermuth became a Christian when he was baptized

into Christ while serving in the military in 1954. In 1971 he was selected by the saints at New Philadelphia to serve them as one of their shepherds. This he has faithfully done for nearly forty years. For twenty-five years he worked as salesman for Goshen Dairy and in 1980 he was chosen the “salesman of the year.” Having retired he presently works as a volunteer for Mobile Meals. Dean has a great love for Christ and His church serving faithfully as a Song Leader and Bible class teacher. The Dummermuth’s serve as hosts for visiting ministers during Gospel Meetings.

**Ron Simmons.** Ron is the son of the late Clarence and Fay Simmons of Moundsville, WV. He was born November 10, 1938. In 1956 he married Janet McCombs and they were blessed with two children, a son Russell Sr. and a daughter Gail. They are grandparents to three grandchildren and one great-grandchild. Ron became a Christian in 1957 when he was immersed into the body of Christ by the late Jess W. Nutter. He was appointed an elder of the New Philadelphia church in 1968. He was employed first by Wheeling Pittsburgh Steel and then by Cyclops Steel/Armco Steel until his retirement in 1994. He pastors his flock with great love and continues to serve as a Bible class teacher.

It is a great privilege to honor these good men, their wives and families for so many years of service to Christ. For nearly a century of combined service they have fed the flock of God over which the Holy Spirit made them overseers.

## *Introduction*

The Book of Acts is a formidable book by any standard. Trying to exhaust it is like trying to drink an artesian well dry—it cannot be done! No mere human could have written it alone and that includes Dr. Luke, who for all his native talent and ability would have found it impossible to know which details of the earliest church history book to include and which to omit. Yet with an accuracy that defies imagination he made every story as complete as need be to build our faith—yet so brief more than thirty years of church history could be packed into twenty-eight short chapters. This unparalleled work has the Holy Spirit written all over it!

In the very early nineteenth century after many began applying the “scientific method” to a study of the Bible, some decided that Luke was wrong about several facts and events as they are recorded. Some thought these could not have transpired as they did and set out to prove their case. One very wealthy Scotsman even retraced the shipwreck journey of Paul in an effort to prove that it could not have been as Luke said. He spent the better part of five years following Paul’s path in ships very much like those used by the apostle, and when his journey ended he concluded it was exactly as Luke said it was. Another man applied the “scientific method” to prove that the events of the Book of Acts would demonstrate that the Bible is unreliable and uninspired. At the end of a sustained examination over many years he wrote a great volume entitled, *The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament*. In this volume he revealed much of his work on the Book of Acts. He became a deep and dedicated believer in Jesus Christ and died a high-ranking clergyperson in the Anglican Church. To hundreds of thousands of people these men proved that any method of man, scientific or otherwise, cannot successfully challenge either God or His Book. Luke’s magnificent work is all it is claimed to be and more.

The candor with which Luke discussed problems that arose in the early church is virtual proof of plenary inspiration of his book. What man in his right mind, following the exploits of an apostle

would have had the temerity to record that sharp disagreement between Paul and Barnabas over John Mark? Did he not know that the revelation of such a disagreement might “turn someone off?” Did he not know that Paul later taught the Romans that brethren are not to disagree that sharply over matters of opinion?

One of the things the Book of Acts does is to validate clearly the apostleship of Paul. Broadly speaking the Book can be divided into two parts with the first thirteen chapters dedicated to the ministry and work of Peter. The fisherman apostle certainly shines brightly in these pages. Some of his adventures even include a mottling of humor, like Rhoda’s leaving Peter standing at the gate, after his divine rescue from prison, while she ran into the house to tell his friends he was outside. The second part of Acts is devoted to the work and adventures of Paul. His work mirrors that of Peter, yet they worked in different areas of the world. So, what is the significance? If the Judaizers and other enemies of Paul questioned his apostleship, they would have to question that of Peter also, for they both engaged in the same type of behavior, preached sermons with very similar wording and certainly the same content. The similarity is uncanny, hence, if Peter was an apostle so was Paul and vice versa. Yet Luke never spoke of a design to prove the apostleship of Paul, indeed, so far as we know, he never questioned it!

The first martyrdoms of saints are recorded in this Book. The horrific and shocking death of Stephen troubles the soul to this day. The senseless slaying of the apostle James just to placate some who intensely disliked Agrippa is equally shocking. Christian life seems to have been exceptionally cheap in those days. Doubtless hundreds, if not thousands were slaughtered, of which we know nothing, or shall ever until the great Day of Judgment. Death stalked the church in the first century. Yet, the saints persevered in spite of the terror they must have experienced at times and God vindicated her before Heaven and Earth.

Some scholars believe the Book closes too abruptly and Luke did not complete it. Others do not agree. It concludes with Paul serving a two-year prison term in Rome. However, no “abruptness” is seen, though, admittedly, the book closes leaving its readers with a

great desire to know more. It has all the earmarks of Luke’s stopping when he reported all the history necessary. It is our prayer that your pleasure in reading this study of the Book of Acts will be as great as ours in making it. May it be a blessing in your life!

*D. Gene West*

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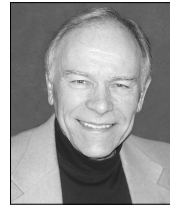
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# *The Distinctive Day*

*Gary Workman*

An astute preacher/professor of the past once wrote this about the second chapter of Acts:



**Gary Workman** has been preaching the Gospel for 52 years and is currently in his 18<sup>th</sup> year as a missionary to the former Soviet Union.

Acts two is one of the most significant chapters in the Bible. It relates so much that had gone before and it bears some relationship to all that follows after. The events which took place on that day were the fulfillment of promises and predictions which God had made through the prophets and through Jesus Christ in His personal ministry. It not only marks the fulfillment, or the beginning of the fulfillment, of many prophecies but it also marks the beginning of the reign of Jesus as Lord and Christ at God's right hand. (Bales 4)

He therefore called this chapter "The Hub of the Bible."

This assessment of Acts chapter two was not overstated. So significant are the events it portrays and the words it presents that it would be almost impossible to exaggerate its importance. In the next two chapters, I have dealt with "The Marvelous Miracle" of verses 1-21 and "The Momentous Message" of verses 22-36. In this overview I will therefore deal with the day itself and a variety of other observations that are not included in those chapters or not

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dealt with in depth. (Note: unless otherwise indicated, all Bible quotations will be from the NKJV.)

### The Day of Pentecost

Verse one tells us that the phenomenal miracle and magnificent message that are recorded in Acts 2 occurred on the day of Pentecost – the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ – and we can still read about the events of “that day” forty verses later. So let us ask what exactly this “day of Pentecost” was.

The word *Pentecost* does not occur in the Old Testament. It is a transliteration of the Greek feminine noun *pentekosté*, which was formed from the numeral *pentékostos*, meaning fiftieth. The term found its origin in rabbinic writings during the time between the testaments and was short for “the Pentecost day” – referring to “the fiftieth day” after Passover (cf. Bruce 49). It was simply a new designation for the feast that was commanded in Leviticus 23:15-21, a feast that was to be observed on the fiftieth day “from the day after the Sabbath” of Passover (vv. 15-16). This was one of three great annual festivals prescribed under Judaism that involved a pilgrimage of males to Jerusalem (Ex. 23:14-16), the others being the Passover and the Feast of Ingathering or Tabernacles. Pentecost is mentioned two more times in the New Testament (Acts 20:16; 1 Cor. 16:8).

In the Old Testament, Pentecost was called “the Feast of Weeks” (Ex. 34:22) since it took place seven weeks after the beginning of the barley harvest (Dunn 783), which began on the next day after the Passover Sabbath (Lev. 23:9-14; Deut. 16:9-12). Pentecost was also called the “Day of Firstfruits” (Num. 28:26) and the “Feast of Harvest” (Ex. 23:16) since it was a harvest feast when “the firstfruits of the wheat harvest” were offered to the Lord (Ex. 34:22). This feast was therefore “a kind of thanksgiving day” for the Israelites at which they thanked God for their blessings (Reese 43). About a hundred years before the birth of Christ, Pentecost also began to be celebrated as a renewal of God’s covenant with Noah (Jub. 6:17-21). And at least by the second century AD it came to be celebrated as the anniversary of the giving of the law at

Sinai (Bruce 50; Dunn 784)—a view based on Jewish understanding of the chronological references in Exodus 19.

It is of great importance to know the day of the week on which this Pentecost of Acts 2 fell. The Old Testament rule was to “count . . . from the day after the Sabbath” of Passover week (Lev. 23:15) and to “count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath” (v. 16). Some contend that the “Sabbath” of Passover week was the regular weekly Sabbath—which, of course, was a Saturday. Others contend that the “Sabbath” of Passover week was the Passover day itself. And since Passover was always celebrated on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of Nisan (Num. 28:16), this date could fall on any day of the week.

The first interpretation was championed by the Sadducees and the second by the Pharisees (Reese 44). Josephus agreed with the Pharisees, but it seems certain that the first interpretation is the correct one. Commenting on the rule in Leviticus 23:15-16, McGarvey stated it well:

This language is not easily misunderstood; for even if in the first clause the words ‘from the morrow after the sabbath’ could be construed as meaning from the morrow after the first day of unleavened bread, the latter part of the sentence precludes such a construction; for the count was to be ‘unto the morrow after the *seventh sabbath*,’ and the word sabbath here unquestionably means a weekly sabbath; and if the fiftieth day was the morrow after a weekly sabbath, then the first must also have been the morrow after a weekly Sabbath. (19-20)

McGarvey is surely correct in this interpretation. In the final analysis, though, it is not as important for us to know which view was correct as it is to know which view controlled Jewish religious practices in the year Jesus died. Scripture tells us that it was the Sadducees who were the religious authorities in power at the time (Acts 5:17), and historians tell us that they prevailed in that role until the destruction of Jerusalem (cf. Bruce 49). This being the case, Pentecost in the time of Christ always fell on a Sunday.

To support this conclusion, there is another line of evidence. Jesus foretold that He would “be raised again the third day” (Matt. 16:21). The “third day” after the death of Jesus (Luke 24:21) was “the first day of the week” (v. 1). This proves that the first day of the week was the day of His resurrection. This fact is important not only in order to know the day our Lord rose again but also to know the day of the week on which the Passover fell that year. Since the resurrection was indisputably on Sunday, it is just as certain that the crucifixion was on Friday. But how is that connected with the Passover?

John’s gospel account says twice that the day of the crucifixion was the “Preparation” of the Passover (John 19:14, 31). Some have attempted to discredit this on the basis of an apparent contradiction with the other gospel writers who, it is claimed, relate that Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper at the regular Passover meal (cf. Matt. 26:17; Mark 14:12; Luke 22:7, 15-16) at the appointed time as prescribed in the Law of Moses. Others have accepted John’s testimony by explaining that the meal recorded by the other three evangelists was eaten a day early in anticipation of Jesus’ crucifixion on the Preparation of the Passover as God’s sacrificial Lamb (cf. Matt. 26:2; 1 Cor. 5:7). (See McClintock and Strong 743-47 for a detailed but now imperfect account of the controversy.)

If John’s account is taken at face value, we know for sure that the Passover convocation that year fell on Saturday. This would explain why John said that “that Sabbath was a high day” (John 19:31). It would mean a double Sabbath – that the Passover and the Sabbath of Passover week were the same day. In this light, the divided Jewish opinions about how to count to the next feast make no difference because it would be the same either way. There could be no doubt that “the day after the Sabbath” of this Passover, from which the fifty-day count was to begin, was a Sunday. And in that case, there could be no question at all that fifty days later Pentecost also fell on Sunday.

Because of these two lines of evidence, it is absolutely certain to this writer that the birthday of the church was on the first day of the week. This understanding is important in connection with the

proper day for the church to assemble for worship. Let us review the cumulative evidence. Not only did Jesus rise from the dead on Sunday, but He also made His first appearance on that same first day of the week (vv. 15-31; John 20:19). Then, eight days later (seven by our way of counting time), Jesus made His second appearance (John 20:26), again on the first day of the week. Finally, the Lord brought His church into existence on the day of Pentecost, yet again on a Sunday if I have interpreted rightly. These are surely the reasons why John made reference to “the Lord’s day” (Rev. 1:10) and why the church assembled and partook of the Lord’s Supper on “the first day of the week” (1 Cor. 16:2; Acts 20:7).

### **The Heavenly Phenomena of Joel’s Prophecy**

The last part of Joel’s prophecy, quoted by Peter in Acts 2:19-21, has to do with something entirely beyond the scope of the day of Pentecost. Some have interpreted it in a literal way as phenomena to occur at the end of time. From my study of the book of Joel itself and other Old Testament prophecies, I believe it is a figurative prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem that took place in AD 70. Readers who would like to pursue this subject should pay attention to Joel 2:9-11 (about an invading army) and the last part of verse 32 (about the remnant being delivered). Then the whole of that should be compared to Matthew 24:1-34, the predictive part of which I believe was all fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem.

In addition, the reader should review the vast use of figurative language in Old Testament prophecies about the destruction of nations like Babylon, Edom and Egypt (Isa. 13:1-10; 34:4-5; Ezek. 32:2-8) in order to understand the same kind of language in these New Testament passages (Matt. 24:29-33; Acts 2:19-21). With this preparation, I believe the uncertain reader will be ready to understand how the sun being darkened and the moon turning to blood (Acts 2:20) could refer to the downfall of the Jewish nation that took place just forty years after this day of Pentecost. There will also be literal catastrophic phenomena in the universe at the second coming of Christ (2 Peter 3:10-12), but I do not believe this

has anything to do with the prophetic references to “heaven” and “earth” in Acts 2:19. In my understanding, Peter made use of the prophecy by Joel to show that the Lord’s promise of baptism in the Holy Spirit was to be fulfilled in the Christian age before the destruction of the Jewish nation.

J. Marcellus Kik had this to say:

In the second chapter of Joel we find two things predicted in the quotation of Peter: fearful judgment upon Israel, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. In the first part of that chapter, and in the midst of the prediction of judgment, the same familiar figurative language is employed in verse 10 . . . This determines for us the meaning of these figurative expressions; as elsewhere, it is symbolic judgment of God. . . What were these judgments? Surely those previous to and during the siege of Jerusalem. These judgments were related by Christ in the first part of Matthew 24. . . Thus the words of Joel, Christ, and Peter harmonize. (73-74)

But what does the end of the quotation mean – that “whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:21)?

It seems that two possibilities exist. (1) This might refer to anyone who would become a Christian in the first forty years of the church’s existence and who would, as a result, not only be “saved” from his sins but also from losing his life in the Roman siege of Jerusalem. Remember, Jesus warned His followers to “flee to the mountains” when they see the signs he foretold—culminating in the invading Empirical forces (Matt. 24:16; Luke 21:20-21). And as far as history recorded it, not one Christian lost his life in the destruction of Jerusalem. (2) The statement might refer to the fact that salvation was not just offered to the Jews but to anyone. As Kik put it,

[T]he kingdom was to be enlarged with the inclusion of the Gentiles. . . . The Mosaic economy with its Levitical priesthood and ceremonial law was finished. The judgment against Jerusalem brought all this to an end. And now as

both Joel and Peter declared: ‘whoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’ . . . We witness that prophetic fulfillment to this day. (74)

### **Can Christians Witness Today?**

In Acts 2:32, Peter said: “This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses.” Today people often speak of “witnessing for Christ.” They have taken this terminology from the New Testament, but they do not use the term “witness” in the biblical sense. This is evident from what Jesus told the apostles: “And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning” (John 15:27). It was the apostles “to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs” (Acts 1:2-3), and only those who saw this evidence can rightly be called witnesses for Christ.

Notice that this is the very point Peter made when he gave his speech on the occasion of selecting a replacement for Judas: “Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection” (Acts 1:21-22). Matthias was then chosen and took his place with the apostles.

In Acts 5, Peter and the other apostles were brought before the Jewish Sanhedrin to answer questions as to why they were preaching the gospel. They responded by referring to the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus. Then they said, “And we are witnesses to these things” (Acts 5:32 ESV). None but first-hand observers (eyewitnesses) could truthfully say that. Years later, Peter made this point plain beyond dispute. Of Jesus he said, “Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly, not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, even to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead” (Acts 10:40-41).

We may preach Christ, teach Christ, and proclaim Christ in every possible way as we also live for Christ. However, we cannot “witness” for Christ unless we are testifying about our own

personal experiences, but that is not what New Testament gospel preaching is all about unless we, like those apostles, have had supernatural experiences as well. The age of miracles is finished, so we have nothing to tell except what we learned from others. An inspired writer said the gospel of Christ “was attested to us by those who heard, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will” (Heb. 2:3-4 ESV). Witnessing for Christ had to do with the supernatural, and we cannot do it today.

### **An Excursus on Hades**

In Acts 2:25-28 Peter quoted Psalm 16 in reference to the soul of Christ in Sheol or Hades. Another key passage for our understanding of the intermediate state of the dead is Luke 16:19-31. There Jesus tells of an ungodly rich man who died and whose body was buried, yet his spirit or soul continued on in conscious existence in “Hades” (v. 23). A righteous beggar also died and his spirit or soul was “carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom” (v. 22). The passage further tells us that the intermediate state has two separate divisions with an impassable gulf in between. Hades is the inclusive term for the entire realm since both the wicked (Luke 16:23) and the righteous (Acts 2:27, 31) have gone there. The state of the ungodly is further described as torment (Luke 16:23-25, 28), and the state of the righteous as Paradise (Luke 23:43).

We should be cautious with this information about drawing the conclusion that Hades is a distinct place as in our three-dimensional world. The word simply means “unseen.” And since it is the realm of disembodied spirits, it may refer more to an unseen condition or state than to an unseen place such as has often been diagrammed on charts. However, the question may legitimately be asked as to where the dead are actually located—especially the righteous dead about whom we have more information.

To answer the question, one cannot just appeal to Luke 23:46 and Acts 7:59, for at death every spirit, whether good or bad, “returns to God” (Ecc. 12:7 ESV). The spirit of every man “goes upward” (Ecc. 3:21) to be placed where God sees fit. However, Paul said of the righteous that when our mortal body is “destroyed”

we have a habitation “in the heavens” (2 Cor. 5:1). Further, Paul said that to be “absent from the body” is to be “at home with the Lord” (v. 8 ASV), and that he longed “to depart and be with Christ” (Philip. 1:23). Since Jesus is in heaven (Mark 16:19), this must be where righteous souls go to be with Him.

It has been objected that we must not ignore the omnipresence of Christ. It is true that God can be in Sheol (Ps. 139:8) and that Christ promised to be “with” us even here (Matt. 28:20), but the above verses indicate a presence with Christ in the same literal sense that we are now in our bodies. When our spirit is in the body, we are “absent” from Him (2 Cor. 5:6). When our spirit is away from the body, we are literally “present” with Him (v. 8). Jesus promised those who overcome that they would sit down with Him on His throne just as He sat down on His Father's throne (Rev. 3:21), and that is exactly where John saw them later in the book (20:4).

There are other strong indications in the New Testament that Hades for the righteous is in heaven. Jesus promised to be with one of the crucified thieves in Paradise (Luke 23:43). Paul located Paradise in “the third heaven” (2 Cor. 12:2-4). The first heaven is Earth's atmosphere (Jer. 4:25) and the second is outer space (Isa. 13:10). The third is God's own dwelling place (Dan. 2:28) – “the heaven of heavens” (1 Kings 8:27). Paul was caught up to this third heaven and into Paradise. There is only one such place, since in all three references to it (Luke 23:42; 2 Cor. 12:4; Rev. 2:7) it is called “the” Paradise.

The tree of life is located in Paradise (Rev. 2:7). But since the tree of life is also said to be in heaven (Rev. 22:1-3, 14), righteous departed souls must therefore be in the heavenly realm. The book of Revelation clearly pictures them there prior to judgment day (6:9-11), and this is the consistent scene that book presents (cf. 7:9-17; 11:12; 15:1-4; 20:4-6). Finally, at the end of time Jesus will return from heaven (2 Thess. 1:7) and bring the souls of these saints “with Him” to be reunited with their resurrected bodies (1 Thess. 4:14-16).

It has been argued that departed spirits surely could not occupy heaven without seeing God (Rev. 22:4) and that, since “no man has

seen God at any time” (1 John 4:12), no human soul has gone to heaven. However, this ignores the case of Paul (2 Cor. 12:1-4), and 1 John 4:12 was written after that visit. Perhaps our seeing God is reserved only for future eternity in glorified bodies. Then again, “no man” may simply mean no mortal man on Earth. Another objection is based on Acts 2:34 and John 3:13—that neither David nor anyone but Jesus has ascended into heaven. These passages, however, speak of bodily ascension. This is clear from the fact that Paul was “caught up” into heaven before John made that statement.

Peter’s argument in Acts 2:29-31 is that David’s body has not left its tomb and that his soul is still in Hades (vv. 29-31). It is only at the end of time when death is no more (1 Cor. 15:54-55) that we will be released from the grave (John 5:28-29) and ransomed from Sheol/Hades (Hos. 13:14) to be “caught up” bodily “in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thess. 4:17). But the question is – where are disembodied souls meanwhile?

It may be that prior to the ascension of Jesus righteous souls were not yet in heaven, for Jesus went “into heaven itself” (Heb. 9:24) as a “forerunner” (6:20), “having obtained eternal redemption” (9:12), in order to cleanse the “heavenly things” (v. 23) and open the “way” for us (10:19-20). Whereas the Paradise segment of Hades may have been moved to heaven as a result of the cross, it is more certain that it is now there (however long that has been the case), for Paul affirmed that it is. There righteous souls are told to “rest” until other earthly lives have ended (Rev. 6:11). We must therefore not confuse the intermediate state with some non-heavenly place. For the righteous, Hades is in the Paradise of heaven.

### **A Prooftext Against Premillennialism**

Psalm 110:1 was quoted by Peter in Acts 2:34-35 to establish Jesus’ present heavenly reign. It was also alluded to by Paul for the same purpose (1 Cor. 15:24-28). The reader should notice that the combination of these two passages completely destroys the premillennial theory. Jesus is to sit at God’s right hand in heaven until God causes all of Jesus’ enemies to be “the footstool” or “under” His feet. For the present, Christ rules in the midst of His

enemies (Ps. 110:2) and thus “we do not yet see all things put under Him” (Heb. 2:8). But the time is coming when “He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power” (1 Cor. 15:24). And since “the last enemy that will be destroyed is death” (v. 26), Jesus must remain in heaven until death is no more! All premillennialists teach that death will not be abolished until the end of the millennium and the dawn of eternity. Therefore, they should logically concede that the millennial reign is taking place right now in heaven (Rev. 20:4-6) and will be finished when Jesus returns.

To further substantiate the application of Paul’s reference in 1 Corinthians 15 to Jesus’ reign at this present time, notice that when Jesus was raised to sit at God’s right hand in heaven (Eph. 1:20) He was placed “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion” (v. 21 ESV; cf. 1 Peter 3:22)—the very things that must be abolished by the end of his reign (1 Cor. 15:24). This means that since Jesus’ ascension God has “put all things in subjection under his feet” (Eph. 1:22), the very statement made by Paul (1 Cor. 15:27) to explain the abolition of death at the end of Jesus’ temporal reign—which all agree takes place at the end of the world. There is therefore no room for any second reign, second destruction of all His enemies, or earthly millennium in between.

### **Conclusion**

If time and space had permitted, many other topical studies could have been included from what is recorded in the second chapter of Acts. This is truly one of the most fascinating and, at the same time, illuminating chapters in the Bible. No one who has truly attempted to plumb its depths can rightly say that he has gotten to the bottom of it. May God help us to study it more and study it better.

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### Biographical Sketch

Gary Workman is a resident of Texas but a native of California with West Virginia roots. He obtained his higher education in Religion and Biblical Languages. He has preached the gospel for 52 years and has been an instructor in six preacher training schools. He is the author of several books and a contributor to scores of lectureship books. For twenty years he was editor and publisher of *The Restorer* magazine. Formerly a missionary to Lebanon and the Middle East, Gary is now in his 18th year as a missionary to the former Soviet Union – his wife, Nadya, by his side.

## *The Gospel in Antioch*

Acts 11:22-26

*Emanuel Daugherty*

### Introduction

I am grateful to the Lectureship Committee for the invitation to speak on this the 2010 Victory Lectures of West Virginia School of Preaching. It is an honor to appear with fellow preachers who



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are quite distinguished for their work and service in the kingdom. All glory, praise and honor to God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ for making salvation possible to fallen men. Our study this year is in the wonderful Book of Acts; my passage for study is chapter eleven.

### Acts Eleven is a Transition Chapter

The conversion of Cornelius in Acts chapter 10, when the apostle Peter used the "keys of the kingdom" a second time, opened the doors of the church to the Gentile world. This marks the transition from Jerusalem in Judea as the focal point of the early church to Antioch of Syria. Antioch became the church which furthered the spread of the Gospel into all the world. It is the transition from being a church made up of Jews and Samaritans (half-Jews) to full-fledged acceptance of the Gentiles as children of God (Matt. 28:18; Acts 1:8). Acts eleven is the transition from the 12 apostles to him who was born out of due season—Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles (9:15).



The city of Antioch in Syria was located about 300 miles north of Jerusalem (there is another Antioch in the southern Galatian region of Pisidia, Acts 13:14). It was named after Antiochus, III, the Great (222-187 BC). With a population of over 500,000 it was the third largest city of the Roman Empire, Rome and Alexandria, Egypt being the other two (Jackson 135). With its large, mixed population, Antioch had a reputation of sin and vice. “A five mile long paved highway led south from the city to the wicked suburb of Daphne, where groves, temples, fountains and baths beckoned to the people. The groves of Daphne were infamous for gross sensuality” (Reese 414). In a footnote Reese adds, “. . . [O]ne Roman satirist complained that the Syrian Orontes had polluted the Tiber River with the tainted stream of luxury and vice (*Satire*, III. 62-64)” (44). Through persecution and upheaval in the early church, and the power of the Gospel, the Lord’s church was planted here enabling this wicked city to become the home base of Paul’s great evangelistic journeys.

### **The Conversion of the First Gentile—Peter Charged, Criticized and Cleared (1-18)**

When the apostles and brethren in Judea heard that Gentiles had been received into the church, they wanted to know how this came about. Men who “were of the circumcision” were some who challenged Peter. These were Christians of Jewish background—perhaps representatives of a group of Pharisees who had become believers who thought, “it was needful to circumcise them (Gentiles) and to command them to keep the law of Moses” (Acts 15:5). It is worthy of pointing out the fact that ordinary members of the church contended with Peter and rebuked him is great evidence that Peter was not a pope, nor the infallible head of the church (Roper 416)!

Peter’s defense of his actions is recorded in verses 4-17. The text says that Peter rehearsed for these brethren all the events in order that had transpired leading up to his going into the house of Cornelius. “Just as Peter was led step by step into his new understanding, so now he is attempting to lead his objectors to the same understanding” (Reese 408). When trying to clear up

problems and issues dividing brethren, it is good to have a careful review of the events and issues under discussion. Peter’s remarks are an almost verbal repetition of the events of chapter 10 leading up to the conversion of Cornelius. Of importance are the six brethren who accompanied Peter to Caesarea; they also came with him to this meeting in Jerusalem to bear witness; also the Spirit falling on Cornelius and his household. Peter says the Holy Spirit fell on them, just as He did upon them at the beginning—a reference to the pouring out of the Spirit on the apostles on Pentecost. “Us” is limited to the apostles. Peter says that God gave them “the same gift as he gave us.” A great deal of debate has taken place as to whether Peter is meaning the baptismal gift of the Holy Spirit, or simply the gift of tongues that the apostles used on Pentecost. Joel’s prophecy said, “I will pour out of my Spirit on all flesh” (Joel 2:28). “All flesh” is limited to Jew and Gentile. On Pentecost the apostles (Jews), received the Spirit; in Acts 10, the house of Cornelius (Gentiles) received the Spirit. The specific gift to the apostles was a baptismal measure. The specific gift to the house of Cornelius was speaking in tongues. Both satisfy the demands of Joel’s promise. The measure of the Spirit given to Cornelius did not make him an apostle—the gift was not for that purpose. The pouring out of the Spirit on Cornelius and his house was to confirm to these Jewish brethren that God had fully accepted the Gentiles into the church.

Wayne Jackson makes an added point saying, “Incidentally, the fact that Peter had to reach all the way back to Pentecost for an adequate example to illustrate the ‘outpouring’ of the Spirit in Caesarea, is evidence of the fact that ‘Holy Spirit baptism’ had not been a practice that occurred between these two episodes” (134).

Concluding his argument, Peter asks, “Who was I, that I could withstand God?” In light of all that God has done to demonstrate His approval of the Gentiles giving them full fellowship in the kingdom, if he did not accept the evidences given, he would be standing against God! In asking this question Peter is also asking these brethren, “What would you have done?”

### **The Reception of Peter's Explanation (18)**

“At first Luke says, they became silent, held their peace, had nothing more to say. Was this silence a time of contemplation? Was it a time to try and absorb what Peter said to them?” (West 124). It seems that very soon, they had removed all doubt from their minds—for they “Glorified God, saying, Then has God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.” Obviously, like Peter, they could see “the hand of God had been in all that had happened, and that they should not stand in God’s way. . . . [A]nother giant step had been taken in removing the barriers between Jews and Gentiles” (Roper 421).

### **The Church Established in Antioch of Syria (19-26)**

Luke the historian, now refers us back to the persecution that arose over the stoning of Stephen, reporting that some of those who had suffered from that persecution had traveled as far as Phoenicia, the island of Cyprus and Antioch of Syria preaching the word. However, they limited their preaching to the Jews only. Verse 20 records that some men of Cyprus and Cyrene, when they came to Antioch, began preaching the Lord Jesus to the Greeks. The word for “Greeks” (*Hellenistes*), which literally means “Hellenists,” is the same word which appears in 6:1 where it refers to Greek-speaking *Jews*. “The context . . . requires that we understand these Hellenists to be Greek-speaking *Gentiles*” (Roper 424).

These scattered evangelists preached the Lord Jesus to all they met. “And the hand of the Lord was with them, *and a great number believed and turned to the Lord*” (11:21, emp. added). Barnabas, a man full of faith, was sent by the church at Jerusalem to see about these momentous happenings; probably to ensure that these were true conversions. Evidently Barnabas was convinced that these were true believers. Again it is stated in verse 24, “and a great many people were added to the Lord.” At this point Barnabas left for Tarsus, to seek Saul. “Why go for Saul? Because he was the chosen vessel to bear the Lord’s new name to the Gentiles” (Dehoff 127). Upon finding him, they came back to Antioch, and for the next year they, working harmoniously with the church,

taught *many people*. It seems obvious that the church at Antioch was continually growing in spiritual momentum.

It was at Antioch that the name Christian is first used to describe the members of the church.

### **“Christian” – The New Name**

While most commentators are not in agreement, it appears to this writer that the “new name” *Christian* is a prophecy from the book of Isaiah (62:2). Wayne Jackson points out, “Interestingly, after the gospel was first proclaimed to the Gentiles (Acts 10), the disciples were called Christians . . . though most commentators see no reference to that in this passage” (124). The objection is to applying Isaiah 62:2 as a prophecy of the name “Christian” since it does not specifically say so. Yet we apply Isaiah 2:2-3 as a prophecy of the New Testament church. Where does the New Testament specifically say so?

The new name was mentioned three times by the great Messianic prophet: “For Zion’s sake I will not hold My peace, And for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest, Until her righteousness goes forth as brightness, And her salvation as a lamp that burns. The Gentiles shall see your righteousness, and all kings your glory. *You shall be called by a new name, Which the mouth of the LORD will name*” (Isa. 62:1-2, emp. added). “For thus saith the LORD unto the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant; Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: *I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off*” (Isa. 56:5, emp. added). “And ye shall leave your name for a curse unto my chosen: for the Lord GOD shall slay thee, *and call his servants by another name*” (65:15, emp. added). “And when he had found him [Saul], he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. *And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch*” (Acts 11:26, emp. added).

### The New Name of Isaiah Has Its Fulfillment in Acts 11:26

Notice some things about the new name and what is said in the passages from Isaiah. (1) It would come after the Gentiles saw the righteousness of God—This name was given after the conversion of Cornelius, the first Gentile to obey the gospel (Acts 10:1, 28, 34-35, 45; 11:1-18). (2) It is in the gospel that the righteousness of God is revealed (Rom 1:16-17). (3) The new name would be given by the mouth of the Lord (by inspiration).

The name *Christian* (***Christianos***) means “one belonging to Christ,” “Christ’s I am.” We belong to Christ, by virtue of the fact that He has bought us with His blood (Matt. 26:26; Acts 29:28; 1 Cor. 6:19-20; 7:23).

They were *called* by a new name. The word *called* (***chrematizo***), be called, be admonished (warned) of God, reveal, speak (Strong’s 5546 *Power Bible CD*). This word carries with it the idea that it is a name divinely given. “It is used one other time as a noun, but in its verb form, eight other times in the New Testament. It is quite obvious that each time it refers to something that was done by God. So the disciples in Antioch were divinely called; they were called of God.” (For further discussion of ***chrematizo*** cf. Duncan 293; Woods 64-67; Franklin 9ff.) It was 10 years before the Gentiles came into the church. Until that time the followers of Christ had been called disciples (student, follower), brethren (family), saints (consecrated for God’s purpose)—but these were not new names. The name “Christian” incorporates all the meaning and significance of these other names. It is the name the apostles accepted (Acts 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16), and the world has taken up. As the faithful wife wears the name of her husband, so Christians, married to Christ, rejoice to wear His name. ***Christian is the only new name in the Scriptures to be applied to God’s people!*** Isaiah said, God would “give unto them in His house [the church, 1 Tim 3:15] and within His walls a name better than sons and daughters, it would be an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off” (56:5). On the other hand, the name of the Jews would be for a curse—but He would call His servants by a *new name* (65:15; cf. Jer. 24:9). “In the New Testament the name *Christian* summarizes all that is new about God’s new people.”

Some have argued that the enemies of the church designated them as “Christians.” But as J. W. McGarvey says “. . . T]his is groundless, as is very clear from the consideration that there is nothing in it belittling or contemptuous” (228). Some say the name was given to designate the Christians from the Jews, but this interpretation is not correct. The Mormons claim that there were people referred to as Christians in 73 BC long before the establishment of the church (Alma 46:13, 16; cf. Jackson 138). “God promised to give a ‘new name’ to His people. When comparisons are made between worldly Israel and spiritual Israel, it is discovered that the peoples were called by the same names—except for one. Members of the Lord’s church are called something that the Jews were never termed” (Hicks 284).

Gareth Reese makes the observation, “[I]t is probably not correct to appeal to Isaiah 62:2 as being a prediction of the name ‘Christian’ being given to God’s people. In the 62nd chapter of Isaiah, there are six new names given. And in the light of the context of Isaiah 62:2, we doubt that it is proper to appeal to it as being a prediction of the specific name ‘Christian’” (421). However, in looking over the six names one finds in Isaiah 62, these are the names found: (1) “Thou shalt no more be called **Forsaken**” an appellation that must be applied to O.T. Israel for this could never be applied to the Lord’s church. (2) “Neither shall thy land be called **Desolate**” Again a name that can only be applied to O.T. Israel since the church of the N.T. cannot be said to have ever been desolate. (3) “Thou shalt be called **Hephzibah**” (My delight is in her). A name applied to Israel after her return from captivity and the opposite of “Forsaken,” and (4) “. . . thy land **Beulah**” (married). See Isaiah 54:4-5, which shows that Israel considered herself a widow, forsaken by God. Also, it must be said that these are not new names at all, for these names were names of wives of kings (Hailey 498). (5) “They shall call them, **The holy people, The redeemed of Jehovah**, (6) And thou shalt be called **Sought out, a city not forsaken**” (12). These designations speak of the new Zion when men would be responding to the gospel call (see Isa. 2:2-3). Can you imagine King Agrippa (Acts 26:28) saying, “Almost you persuade me to be Forsaken? Desolate?”

Hephzibah? Or Beulah?” Or can you imagine Peter saying, “If anyone suffers as a Christian, let him glorify God” in any of these proposed names? To this author, the clincher against Reese’s argument on the six names in chapter 62 is that the name to be given by the mouth of Jehovah would not be given until “the nations” (Gentiles) would see the righteousness of Jehovah—something that was not done until the conversion of Cornelius (Acts 10). It is much more than coincidental that the conversion of the first Gentile is recorded in the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter of Acts, and his conversion rehearsed so thoroughly in chapter 11, and then the name Christian should be recorded for the first time at the close of the same chapter!!

Why is it that men want to impose human names upon the divine name? Why do they describe themselves as Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Catholics, etcetera, and still try to wear the name Christian? The Holy Scriptures know nothing about hyphenated Christians: Methodist-Christians, Baptist-Christians, Catholic-Christians, and so-on and so-forth. If the Lutheran church does a good deed, who gets the glory? The name of Luther. But if the church of Christ should do it, whose name would be glorified? The name of Christ. Paul said, “To him be the glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages; world without end” (Eph. 3:21). In Philippians 2:9-11 it is stated that God has given His Son “a name above every name.” Did not the prophet say that the divine name would be better than the names of sons and daughters? Is it not then better than all human names; better than the name of Luther, Calvin, Wesley, or Campbell? It was Shakespeare, who made Juliet to say, “What’s in a name? A rose by any other name would smell as sweet.”

This sentiment might be expected from a love-sick girl, but surely not from an intelligent, thinking person. I read recently an advertisement of a chiropractor in a little town in Missouri, and his name was “W. R. Twist.” Yet people will say there is nothing in a name (Crawford 104)!

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#### Biographical Sketch

Emanuel Daugherty was born in Philippi, WV, January 12, 1939. He was baptized February 5, 1950, by Miris Wright in Warren, OH. He married Judith R. Null, July 16, 1958, and to their union was born: Bruce (Gayle), who preaches for the 10<sup>th</sup> & Clairmont Church of Christ in Cambridge, OH; Ramona (Stephan)

Haynes, at Fishinger-Kenny Church of Christ, Columbus, OH; Rachel (Maken) Cornell, at Alkire Road, Grove City, OH; Rebecca Poe, husband Brad preaches at Rome Church of Christ, Proctorville, OH. The Daugherty's have eight grandchildren, four boys and four girls, and one great-grandson. He graduated from Braceville HS, Trumbull County, OH, 1956, Getwell Road School of Preaching (Memphis School of Preaching) 1968, Alabama Christian School of Religion (Southern Christian University) in 1982. He has preached at Alkire Road Grove City, OH 1968-1989, Dewey Avenue St Marys, WV, 1989-1994, and served as Director and Teacher for West Virginia School of Preaching 1994-2003. He has held Gospel meetings in West Virginia, Ohio, Illinois, Kentucky, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Wisconsin. Emanuel is the author of *Commentary on the Book of Daniel* and currently serves as a faculty member at West Virginia School of Preaching and preaches for Salem Church of Christ, Marshall County, Glen Easton, WV since 2003.

## *The Cross of Christ in Acts*

*Rick Kelley*

It is an understatement to say that the cross is a symbol. It is perhaps the most recognizable symbol in the world. It is inexorably tied to the Christian faith. No doubt this will be so until the Lord returns.



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As we consider *The Cross of Christ in Acts*, we are going to turn our attention to the word CROSS itself, using each letter to describe some aspect of its significance. We will look at the cross as a symbol of: *Cruelty, Redemption, Obedience, Suffering and Salvation.*

### **The Cross as a Symbol of Cruelty**

Historically, as a physical object, the cross stands for shame and cruelty. The English word is rooted in the Latin *crux*, whose many forms gave birth to other English words like, “crucify” (to torture), and “excruciating” (severely painful).

The practice of death by impaling or hanging victims on cross-shaped structures is extant among many ancient writings (Varner 8; Edwards, Gabel and Hosmer 1458). Reportedly, the Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Egyptians, Scythians, Indians, Germans, Persians, Assyrians, Greeks, and Romans all practiced it (Varner 8). Of course, it is most often associated with the Romans, who executed the most famous crucifixion victim in history, Jesus of Nazareth.

Crucifixion was practiced in large part to discourage insurrection. It was the symbol of authority and control. “[I]t served to warn the people to abstain from certain crimes,” such as: “piracy, assassination, perjury, and treason” (8). With respect to Jesus’ death on the cross, there are several things to consider.

Jesus’ crucifixion process was remarkably cruel. Before being placed upon the actual cross, Jesus was under intense stress. Prior to His betrayal, arrest, abandonment, and a sleepless night of injurious “trials,” He suffered a rare medical condition called hematidrosis (or hemohidrosis), in which victims “hemorrhage into the sweat glands” and “the skin becomes fragile and tender” (Edwards, Gabel, and Hosmer 1456). Not surprisingly, Luke the physician reports both the symptom, and the cause (“anguish” Luke 22:44a).

Jesus was brutally scourged. Prior to the scourging, Jesus would have been stripped nearly (or actually) naked (Edwards, Gabel, and Hosmer 1457). His scourging has been reported as “particularly harsh” (1458; Varner 11) in nature. M.R. Vincent remarked on the term, “stripes,” (cf. 1 Peter 2:24) as,

meaning a *bloody wale* which arises under a blow. “Such a sight we feel sure, as we read this descriptive passage, St. Peter’s eyes beheld on the body of his Master, and the flesh so dreadfully mangled made the disfigured form appear in his eyes like one single bruise” (Lumby). (309)

Hematidrosis probably rendered His skin particularly vulnerable to this beating.

It seems the scourging ordered by Pilate may have been an effort to shock the Jews, and to abate their bloodthirsty and irrational cries for His death. As Vincent reported:

Scourging was the legal preliminary to crucifixion, but, in this case, was inflicted illegally before the sentence of crucifixion was pronounced, with a view of averting the extreme punishment, and of satisfying the Jews. (Luke

23:22). . . . The severity of the infliction in Jesus’ case is evident from His inability to bear His cross. (502)

Apparently startled at the Jews’ hostility, and perhaps hoping to quell their passion and awaken their conscience (cf. John 19:4-5), Pilate then took the Savior and presented His battered and bloody frame to the crowd. Unfortunately for Jesus, Pilate’s strategy only ensured that Jesus suffered a more cruel scourging than usual prior to His crucifixion (John 19:6).

After the scourging, He was mocked, His head was pierced with thorns, and He was struck in the head repeatedly with a rod by Roman soldiers (cf. Matt. 27:27-30; Mark 15:16-20, esp. v.19, ESV; Luke 22:63-65). Isaiah indicates that in addition to the beating, Jesus suffered two more painful and repulsive insults (cf. Isa. 50:6). The hair of His beard was plucked out. Young reported that the beard was regarded “as a sign of freedom and respect, and to pluck out the hair of the beard . . . is to show utter contempt” (300). Also, He was spat upon, “an act of ritual defilement and contempt” (Hailey 419), the “most insulting and degrading of contemptible gestures” (Young 300).

Jesus’ death was publicly humiliating. Following the scourging and subsequent emotional and physical taunting, Jesus was forced to publicly carry the cross-beam of His own death device to the crucifixion site, just outside the city. Luke details this walk, which was accompanied by a Roman military guard, and preceded by a herald. The herald’s occupation was to loudly proclaim the charges of the accused, while holding the *titulus*, a tablet upon which the name and crime of the victim were made public (cf. Luke 23:26-31). Jesus suffered all this cruelty before His hands and feet were ever fastened to the final instrument of death at Golgotha.

Outside the city, the cruelty continued. Jesus was painfully fastened to the crossbar with iron spikes through His hands and raised upon the *stipes*, the upright post already anchored in the ground. Iron spikes in His feet permanently fixed His brutalized frame to the accursed instrument. By this time, His body was little more than a mass of bloody, unidentifiable flesh (cf. Ps. 22:17; Isa. 52:13-15; Heb. 10:5-10).

Most victims were offered a mild sedative, but Jesus refused (cf. Ps. 69:21; Matt. 27:34). Just before death, when Jesus cried out in painful thirst (cf. Ps. 22:15; John 19:18), He was given a vinegar-filled sponge, extended on a hyssop stalk (John 19:19), the drink of the soldiers on duty. One described the conditions of another crucifixion victim:

A young Mameluke was crucified near the river Barada. When the cross was lifted up and planted his agony was so great that he gave way to convulsive writhings and nearly tore his feet loose from the nails which fastened them. Then came the fever and then the thirst. At last he forgot all about his bleeding hands and feet and the awful thirst moved him to cry with eyes on the river: "Water! Water!! Water!!!" (Long 58)

While the Scriptures do not specify, if the hyssop stalk were of average proportion (about 20 in.), this likely indicates that Jesus suffered His final 6 hours, not elevated far above passers-by, but on a short cross, humiliatingly just above ground level (Edwards, Gabel, and Hosmer 1462). While He watched, but as if He were already dead, the four soldiers on duty split His head gear, sandals, girdle and fringed outer garment among themselves (John 19:23a). Then, they gambled for His valuable, seamless coat (cf. Ps. 22:18; John 19:23b).

Finally, while it must have been of some comfort to have His mother, His best friend, and several other women standing nearby (cf. John 19:25-27), it must have been a bittersweet disgrace at best. Rejected, despised, humiliated, "cut off" (cf. Isa. 53:8), Jesus hung before His friends and family in disgrace. No wonder the Hebrews writer said that Jesus "endured the cross, despising the shame" (Heb. 12:2). As Varner described, "Whether the cross was used to torment or to execute . . . the death by the cross was abhorred by all" (8). The cross of Jesus symbolizes the depths of human cruelty.

### **The Cross As a Symbol of *Redemption***

A simple definition for redemption is to pay a price, monetary or otherwise. As Warfield pointed out, "Christ . . . has actually shed His blood for as [our] ransom . . . [our] salvation has been bought . . . at a tremendous price, at the price of nothing less precious than blood . . . the blood of Christ" (347) (cf. Matt. 20:28; Acts 20:28; 1 Tim. 2:6). "There is no one of the titles of Christ which is more precious to Christian hearts than "Redeemer"" (Warfield 325).

The word *redeemer* is used over 100 times in the Old Testament, and is a prominent theme in the books of Job and Ruth. As Wayne Jackson pointed out, pertaining to the Scriptures, it means:

"[T]o do the part of a kinsman," and thus "to redeem" one's kin from difficulty or danger ( Harris 144). The Redeemer could: avenge a slain kinsman (Numbers 35:19-27); marry a deceased relative's childless widow (Ruth 4:10); purchase a loved one out of slavery (Leviticus 25:55; or buy back a kinsman's property that had passed from the family (Leviticus 25:23-25). The word is also used of God, as one who vindicates and redeems his people (Isaiah 43:1-3). (Jackson)

In the book of Job, we read about a man who suffered compound tragedies (cf. Job 1:13-22; 2:7). His friends indicted him. His wife indicted God. He reasoned that there must be a better explanation. He eventually said: "For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God" (Job 19:25-26, NKJV).

It appears from this passage that Job believed he would somehow be vindicated personally, even though he was not perfectly innocent. As a patriarch who by faith offered burnt offerings as a mediator for his own children (Job 1:5), perhaps we should not be surprised at his understanding of that concept.

Job held fast to the idea that there would eventually be a Redeemer, a *Person*. This One could "lay his hand upon us both [God and man]" (Job 9:33). To Job's mind, because of God's perfect character (cf. Gen. 18:19), sin would be dealt with, *and the*

sinner could have the opportunity to be redeemed. As Lanier stated, “[T]he holiness of God, and a realization of the lack of holiness on our part should impress us with the necessity of a mediator between us and God . . . [who] must be equally related to both” (105).

The second well-known picture of redemption is found in the book of Ruth, where Boaz became the kinsman-redeemer of the Messianic lineage (the lineage of Christ, cf. Matt. 1:1, 5) by his marriage to Ruth.

The laws God enacted to preserve the integrity of the Messianic lineage were indigenous to the Israelites, and had practical as well as spiritual purposes. When Jewish families fell upon hardship and needed to sell a portion of land, a redeemer from among their family could purchase back the land that had been sold (Lev. 25:25-26). Judicially, when a life had been taken by murder, it was a redeemer who avenged the blood of his fallen relative (Deut. 19:6).

“Redeemer” also described one who married his brother’s widow if he died before they had any heirs (Vine, Unger, and White 194). It is called “the duty of a husband’s brother.” According to the Scriptures:

If brethren dwell together, and one of them die, and have no child, the wife of the dead shall not marry without unto a stranger: her husband’s brother shall go in unto her, and take her to him to wife, and perform the duty of a husband’s brother unto her. (Deut. 25:5)

Naomi and her daughters-in-law (Orpah and Ruth) all lost their husbands, leaving them all with no children to carry on the family name and honor. Orpah returned to her native Moab, but Ruth clung to her mother-in-law and came to Bethlehem (Ruth 1:16-18). In Bethlehem, Ruth began working in a field owned by a righteous man named Boaz, and caught his eye. In fact, they found favor in each other. Furthermore, Boaz was a relative to Ruth’s late father-in-law, Elimelech.

When Naomi learned of Ruth’s interest in Boaz, she advised

Ruth to make her desire known to him, which she did (Ruth 3:1-5). In accordance with God’s will, Boaz told her there was legally another relative closer than he, but if he would not redeem her, then Boaz would (Ruth 3:10-13). The next day, Boaz met with the elders and the nearest relative (kinsman), announcing that Naomi’s previously sold property needed to be “redeemed.” The nearest kinsman agreed to redeem the property, until Boaz announced that redeeming Ruth would be part of the deal (Ruth 4:5-6)! The offer officially rejected, Boaz then redeemed the property, and his bride, Ruth, the great-grandmother of David (cf. Matt. 1:5-6), preserving the Messianic line.

In Job, the redeemer sets things right, with a perfect combination of justice and mercy. In Ruth, the redeemer buys back a piece of property, brings honor to a childless widow, and restores the honor of the family name. In both, it is an act of compassion, sacrifice and duty. Ultimately, the kinsman-redeemer acted, not because it was convenient or enjoyable, but because God commanded it.

This is the role Jesus played in our redemption. Paul wrote that we have “redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins” (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14). Through His supreme sense of duty to God (cf. Heb. 10:4-10) and compassion toward man, through the cross, Jesus became our redeemer.

### **The Cross As a Symbol of *Obedience***

The cross declares that obedience is inseparably tied to salvation. Some have expressed the idea that the human efforts involved in obedience somehow contradict or nullify God’s grace. Nothing could be further from the truth.

That human obedience is a necessary element in the plan of salvation is easy to see by the answers an honest person would give to these questions about what God requires. True or False? (None of these work in tandem; they all stand alone. If 1 is true, 2 and 3 are false, etc.). (1) *God requires no obedient response* by humanity whatsoever. (2) *God only accepts an absolute obedient (sinless perfection) response* on the part of humanity. (3) *God provided a conditional plan* by which sinful humanity has the possibility of being declared innocent.



The answer to 1 is obviously false, unless we accept universalism. Universalism essentially says that everyone will be saved on the basis of God's mercy alone, and not on any human response whatsoever. Jesus said, "Not everyone that saith unto me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of [i.e. obeys] my Father, which is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21; cf. 25:46). In spite of God's mercy, some will still be lost. Jesus said universalism (#1) is false.

The answer to #2 should be obvious as well, as "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). Again, the cross nullifies the idea that absolute obedience is the only answer to salvation for humanity. If absolute obedience were the only possibility for humanity to access heaven, then we are all hopelessly lost, and the cross would have been of no value. Thus, #2 is false.

So #3 must be correct. God has provided a conditional plan by which those guilty of sin could have the possibility of being declared innocent.

The argument now involves whether or not all the conditions for human salvation were satisfied at the cross. Again, let us examine three more statements: (1) *No conditions* for human salvation were met at the cross. (2) *All possible conditions* for human salvation were met fully at the cross. (3) All conditions for human salvation *were made possible at the cross*.

No advocate of Christianity would argue for #1. Is #2 correct? Were all conditions for human salvation met fully at the cross? Again, to affirm this would be to affirm universalism, which we already established as false. Some people will be lost, some will be saved. If some are lost with all possible conditions for salvation being fully met, then God would be to blame for those who are lost. God will not be to blame for some being lost; thus, #2 is false.

That leaves us with #3, all conditions for human salvation *were made possible at the cross*. This fits the character of God as well as the nature of man, as revealed in Scripture.

The cross declares that God is holy and righteous in dealing with sin, as well as merciful toward man in his sin (cf. Rom. 3:26). The cross also declares that man's justification lies within the condition

of obeying the revealed will of God in Christ, known as the New Testament.

There is absolutely no difference between saying that the faithful are "doers of the word, and not hearers only" (James 1:22), and saying that the faithful are obedient. Any difference in these statements is imaginary. Both involve submission (i.e. obedience) to God's revealed will. You can call it "hearing and doing," or you can call it "obedience" (cf. Heb. 5:8-9), but you are saying the same thing either way.

It is expected that my children obey me (or "hear and do," whichever you prefer). In essence, they are *to behave like children*. Ideally, a child is more than just an offspring. By definition, a child is one who is under the authority of his parents. There is a very real sense in which, when children disobey their parents, they cease to do that which defines them as children.

To become a child of God, *we choose to behave like one*. We choose for God to be our Father, because He has offered adoption to us (cf. Gal. 4:4-7). Jesus was the perfectly obedient Son, who in His flesh bore our punishment on the cross (cf. Isa. 53:12; 1 Peter 2:24). Our choice to serve the perfect Son is called obedience.

Nevertheless, acts of disobedience occur. We sin. Even after we put on Christ to purge our old sins (2 Peter 1:9), we make mistakes. The cross made forgiveness for these incidents possible by Jesus now acting as our Advocate (1 John 2:1-2), Mediator (1 Tim. 2:5), and High Priest (Heb. 7:25). What the cross did not do was make provision for: (1) those who either reject the Christ entirely (blasphemy), or (2) those in Christ who keep on sinning deliberately and willfully. There is no sacrifice for either of these kinds of sin (cf. Heb. 10:26, NIV).

Obedience to God was given its fullest expression both by Jesus' life, and His death on the cross. He chose to suffer a cruel, inhumane, shameful death, rather than dishonor God (cf. Philip. 2:5-8). This is what made Him the perfect Son (cf. Heb. 2:10).

To obey as a Christian means to act like God's child. It means to be an obedient child, one who would do everything in his power to keep from dishonoring his Father. It means to submit, to trust, to be humble and respectful, regardless of cost. In instances of sin, it

means to be honest, sorrowful and forsaking of it (cf. 2 Cor. 7:10; 1 John 1:7).

### **The Cross as a Symbol of *Suffering***

This is no doubt why Jesus compared the Christian life to bearing a cross (cf. Luke 9:23). The cross is a symbol for, and comfort in, all suffering. The late brother Thomas B. Warren referred to it as a sort of “supreme instance” by which all suffering may be understood.

Several years ago, Mel Gibson’s *The Passion of the Christ* portrayed the final suffering hours of Jesus’ life. The movie was highly controversial for a few reasons, not the least of which was the extended exposure that was given to the level of suffering a crucifixion victim endured.

Human sensibility is fickle indeed. It is amazing that human beings can watch hours of television, video games and movies filled with horror, violence, foul language, innuendo, bloodshed and death, and not bat an eye. Yet, we are too sensitive to examine the death of the Lord Jesus on the cross.

The prophet Isaiah gave as much graphic insight into the nature of Jesus’ death as the gospel writers themselves. Speaking in terms of Jehovah’s suffering Servant, he wrote, “[H]is visage was so marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men” (Isa. 53:14).

There is a sense in which His entire incarnation involved the suffering of indignity (cf. Philip. 2:5-8). He accepted an impoverished entrance into the world. He was ridiculed, mocked and abandoned (cf. John 6:66), called a drunk, crazy, and demonic (cf. Luke 7:34; John 10:19-20), rejected by His townspeople and family (Luke 4:16), and treated unjustly by the political and civil system. His life and death was in all respects the suffering of indignity.

It is amazing that in the baptism of suffering that characterized Jesus’ final hours, He never uttered a cross word (cf. 1 Peter 2:21-23). To the contrary, He spoke helpful, compassionate and kind words!

If the cross teaches us nothing else, it teaches us that suffering can have tremendous value, and that there is an attitude with which we should strive to endure it.

From the time we are children, we suffer injuries and pains. These injuries and pains teach us. They teach us to avoid certain negative situations, items, people, etc. They also point us in the direction of positive alternatives. We might truly say that the sufferings of Jesus teach us to avoid certain things (sin), and to search for the positive alternatives (righteousness).

In this sense, and in light of the cross, we understand that God is justified in allowing our suffering. To say otherwise is to stand in judgment against God. When looking at the cross, a person can even see the benefits of his suffering, and can even find reasons to be thankful for it. Just as children later learn to appreciate the discipline of their parents, children of God learn to appreciate God’s wisdom in allowing human suffering (cf. Heb. 12:5-11).

We correct our children because we love them so deeply. God loves us even more. He loves us so much in fact, that He was willing to endure suffering for us (cf. 2 Cor. 5:18-19). If we miss this truth of the cross, we may just miss it all. We must learn to allow our “light affliction, which is but for a moment” (2 Cor. 4:17) to draw us to deeper trust in Him (Ps. 119:67, 71, 75).

### **The Cross as a Symbol of *Salvation***

Perhaps the most obvious of all, the cross symbolizes salvation. It symbolizes man’s need for salvation. “[T]he crucifixion is rightly understood only when it is seen as God’s great saving act. It is the means God used to deal with the problem of human sin” (Morris 11). It symbolizes God’s supreme interest in our salvation and the dreadfulness of sin.

It is said that “the law . . . was added because of transgressions” (Gal. 3:19), so that sin, by the commandment (O.T.), might become exceeding sinful (Rom. 7:13). The Hebrew Scriptures were a training tool (cf. Gal. 3:24) to awaken human conscience to the reality and consequences of sin, and the need of salvation that only God could provide. Everything the law attempted to expose

the human conscience to was given an ultimate, tangible expression in the cross.

Therefore, we must conclude: it had to be the cross. It was not enough for Jesus to die. Everyone dies. If any death would do, then Jesus could have died in His sleep. He could have died from food poisoning, a work-related accident, or in war. But none of these would have accomplished God's ultimate purpose: man's salvation.

It had to be the cross. It had to be somewhere Jesus could experience and demonstrate the separation, loss, despair, ugliness, shame, horror, guilt, fear of sin and its ultimate outcome. All of these things lay in store (and worse) for sinful humanity if they do not repent. Jesus willingly sacrificed His body to torture for our salvation (cf. John 10:15, 17).

It had to be the cross. Jesus' death on the cross screams with overwhelming volume that sin is the problem, and it is far worse than any of us can imagine. It took a complete baptism of suffering to show humanity how much God hates sin, and loves sinful men. Jesus willingly embodied the shame and grotesqueness of sin in His body on the cross. Walker expressed it this way:

Jesus accepted the Cross, seeing in it a way of serving God his Father and the only way of saving his people . . . he believed that he could do something by dying that would not be accomplished by longer living. He thus went out to meet death, not in resignation or bitterness, but as one accomplishing a mighty task. (18)

Warfield proclaimed, "the cross is placarded before our eyes and our hearts are filled with loving remembrance not only that Christ has given us salvation, but that He paid a mighty price for it" (325).

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## *Paul's Conversion*

*Dan Kessinger*

The conversion of a Jewish partisan named Saul must surely rank among the most significant events recorded in the New Testament. This would be so even if Saul had never preached, had not been called to be an apostle, had not become the most significant of



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them, had not been responsible for the proclamation of Jesus Christ throughout the Gentile world. Just the fact that such a noted enemy of Christianity actually converted to it serves as testimony that the gospel has extraordinary transforming power. If one such as Saul of Tarsus may be converted, then the possibilities are virtually endless.

### **God Targets Saul for Conversion**

God seems to have had a special and particular interest in the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. Though one may not claim a full understanding of God's agenda, there are some probable implications of this particular conversion. First, it reveals the nature of an all-knowing God. While God encourages us to preach the gospel to all that will hear, to sow the seed whether it takes root or not, God knows before hand where the sowing will be productive. This full and complete knowledge of our Maker is mentioned in Romans 4:17. It reads "God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did;" Therefore, God already knew that Saul, once faced with the evidence, would become obedient to the gospel. This factor also

### **Biographical Sketch**

Rick spent his childhood in Tennessee, Illinois, Kentucky, and West Virginia, the son of a gospel preacher. He graduated from Lincoln High School, Shinnston, WV (1995), and is married to his high school sweetheart, Samantha (Emerson). This union has been blessed with 6 children: Christian, Hannah, Noah, Emma, Evan, and Leah. He has been preaching since November 2000, and is a 2004 graduate of WVSOP. He has worked with churches in Wallace, Shinnston, and Proctor, WV, and is currently in his 7<sup>th</sup> year with the Prestonsburg Church of Christ, Prestonsburg, KY. He has written several Bible study courses, tracts and booklets for the church he currently serves. He is the speaker on the weekly "Know Your Bible" program, the longest continually-running religious broadcast in eastern Kentucky. He enjoys spending time with his family, hiking, reading and playing music.

explains how it was possible for Saul to have been told that he had been chosen for his life's work before he was even a Christian. God knew what the future held for Saul. Ananias, who taught Saul the gospel, had reservations about meeting with him in Damascus, and expressed those to the Lord in Acts 9:13-14. The Lord's answer follows in Acts 9:15-16 "But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake.'"

If Saul of Tarsus were to convert, there can be no doubt that he would be a powerful force on behalf of the church. But do we know that he was uniquely qualified? That is, were there any other well-trained Jewish advocates who, if converted, could also have preached as he preached? Were there others who were equally trained in the disciplines of Jewish Law and philosophy? Of course we cannot know for certain, but it seems reasonable to assume that there were. Why were they also not chosen? Is it because God knew their hearts, and that they would not convert even under these extraordinary circumstances? It seems like a reasonable conclusion.

The special conversion of Saul reveals other principles concerning the nature of God. While one seeking truth today may not expect such an event as took place on the road to Damascus, one may conclude that the God of the universe is still intimately familiar and interested in each individual, well acquainted with each person. In Matthew 10:29-30 we read, "Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered." God knows the billions of lost on our Earth today, not as a mass of humanity, but by their names. He knows their thoughts and their destinies as well. And He cares deeply for each of them. When we read that "God so loved the world" in John 3:16, this love is extended on a marvelous personal level to each person. God knew Saul, and He knows you and me as well.

As it applies to current evangelism efforts, God's concern for Saul serves as a reminder that those who have not yet heard the gospel are more than just numbers, maps of a faraway place, or

even pictures in a missionary's slide show. They are real people with problems, families, struggles, and value. God sees them clearly, just as he saw Saul of Tarsus. To forget the value of individuals seems to have been why God rebuked Jonah in Jonah 4:11. It reads, "And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left-and much livestock?"

### **Saul the Infidel**

When the Bible reader is first introduced to Saul of Tarsus, there was hardly a more unlikely candidate for conversion than he. Having heard the marvelous testimony of Stephen, he seems utterly unmoved, and consents to the lynching of Stephen (Acts 7:58-8:1). When we next read of Saul, his zeal against Christianity has compelled him to travel abroad in order to find and persecute Christians. Yet by Paul's own testimony, his conscience on these matters was perfectly clear (Acts 23:1). In testimony given to King Agrippa, Paul stated "Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth" (Acts 26:9). Clearly, though Saul had been the church's number one enemy, his lack of faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ was a matter of being honestly mistaken. How was it possible the Saul had not been confronted with the evidence that could have convicted him? As the matter is recorded in the Gospels, it seems that the entire region of Judea had been presented with overwhelming evidence regarding Jesus and the resurrection. Paul himself would remind King Agrippa that these events did not happen in a corner (Acts 26:26). When Jesus (disguised from recognition) asked the two disciples about the topic of their conversation in Luke 24:18, Cleopas replied "Are You the only stranger in Jerusalem, and have You not known the things which happened there in these days?"

It is not probable that Saul was in Jerusalem at the time of the crucifixion of Jesus, or for several years previous. If he had been, it is unaccountable that in all his speeches and epistles he makes no allusion to a personal knowledge of

events in the life of Jesus. . . . The supposition that he had returned to Tarsus previous to the beginning of John's ministry, and had reappeared in Jerusalem after the ascension of Jesus, is most agreeable to all the known facts in the case. When the conflict arose between Stephen and the Jews of the foreign synagogue, Saul was almost certainly one of the Cilicians who encountered him (vi.9); and his superior learning in the law naturally placed him in the front rank of the disputants. (McGarvey 169)

If McGarvey is correct, Saul had not really been confronted with evidence at all. As a loyal Jew, he would believe that he was, as he stated in the previously cited Acts 26:9, doing the will of God by persecuting Christians. While Saul's lack of faith in the Christ may be excused by his ignorance, the local Jewish hierarchy could not. But Saul, having been briefed on the matter by unprincipled liars, had most probably been misled.

Concerning Saul's ignorance, it was a mitigating factor in his responsibility, but it did not make him a saved person. Concerning his former state, Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 1:13, "although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief." The mercy of which Paul wrote was not saving grace irrespective of repentance. The mercy was in God's allowing him the opportunity to both repent and to live his life making amends for the deeds of the former man who had been the chief of sinners (1 Tim. 1:16)

One wonders if the manner in which Stephen had died were troubling to Saul at all. The matter of Saul's conscience it not in dispute, if one accepts the testimony of the apostle himself. Perhaps he passed off the beautiful martyrdom as a sad loyalty of the deceived. This would be an ironic conclusion indeed! But even if Saul's conscience were clear, one must consider Stephen's faith as part of the preparation process in Saul's conversion.

What is it about Saul of Tarsus that makes his conversion to Christ inevitable. The Saul who was traveling to Damascus was a man of talents and abilities, but those are being misused. They would eventually render him valuable to Jesus in the conversion of

others. He is a man of conviction, but his faith is misplaced in the Old Testament, incomplete. As previously noted, there were certainly others of similar abilities and training who were not also converted. What was it about Saul the infidel that made him fertile ground for the gospel?

Saul was passionate about searching for truth, even when he himself had not yet found it. He was also keenly aware of sin and its consequences. The importance of Saul's pure conscience cannot be overemphasized. Truth can only convert those who value it. My Dad used to say that the most dangerous man in any community was not the one who killed another human being, but one who had killed his own conscience. Though Saul had abused Jesus by persecuting Christians, he had done so believing it to be the will of God. He had always believed that sin ought to be forsaken, and seems to have been well aware of the nature of rebellion against God. Unlike the cold-hearted hypocrisy evidenced by the Jewish hierarchy that had opposed Jesus, Paul had been tormented by his own failings under the law. "But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom. 7:23-24).

There are those who are also, like Saul of Tarsus, keenly aware that truth must be sought and honored. There are those who realize that they fall short of God's standards, even the few standards and principles of which they are aware. Some of these are infidels just as was Saul of Tarsus. For the last decade or so, the Western world has been justifiably concerned about the increase in Islamic radicalism around the world, and even here in the United States. But perhaps some of those fundamentalists, who believe that God must be honored, and that sin must be avoided at all costs, may prove to be fertile ground for the preaching of the gospel.

### **The Opening of Saul's Heart and Mind**

While the heart of Saul was tender, his mind had not yet been properly informed. The Bible frequently cites the heart in reference to thinking, thus reminding us that the heart and mind are mutually

dependant. Acts 8:22 reads, “Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you.” In Romans 10:10 we read, “For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” We have a tendency to think of the heart having a mind of its own independent of the mind. And unfortunately for many who blindly follow their emotions into sin, this may be true! But Saul’s heart, his center, would have to be guided by the information that he would receive.

Some may wonder if everyone would be converted if only they had an experience like Saul’s on the road to Damascus. It is not true. What of the others who were with Saul? Why do we not read of their conversion? While they did not understand the words of Jesus to Saul, they certainly heard a disembodied voice (Acts 9:7; Acts 22:9; Acts 26:14). Surely Saul related the conversation to them. Was that not enough testimony to convince any observer to re-think his position on killing Christians? A similar thought was expressed by the condemned rich man of Luke 16. He was of the opinion that his brothers would be converted if only they could hear the testimony of a resurrected Lazarus (Luke 16:27-28). But Abraham replied “If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.”

Saul’s experience was productive because it opened his pure heart by correcting his thinking. Others may have their thinking corrected without it having any impact on their hearts. Sometimes, we Christians forget that conversion is only an option for us. Our Lord did not convert every hearer, because not every hearer cared to be converted. Sometimes we look for problems in either the messenger or the message, and forget that hearts must be receptive to truth. Even when the seed is faithfully, lovingly, and humbly sown, the ground must be ready (Luke 8:4-15). In the case of Saul of Tarsus, once the mind was convinced, the heart was convicted.

Saul’s conversion reminds the reader of the value of chastisement in opening one’s mind. Presumably, Saul had heard the marvelous defense of Stephen, but had been unmoved. Saul seemed to have been a young man of whom great things were anticipated, a rising star in the Jewish religion. To reach such a

person is difficult indeed. It is ironic to contemplate that Saul did not see the light until he was blinded by it!

Few of us would dare to request that God give us more difficulties in life. However, the answer to such a prayer would probably bless many of us. It was the common people, not the prosperous ones, who heard Jesus gladly (Mark 12:37). James reminds us “Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?” (James 2:5). Many of us, even Christians, devote our lives to a level of comfort that insures that God’s message cannot really get through to us at all. If everything seems to be going well in my life, why make a change? It is no coincidence that the prodigal son did not “come to himself” until all of his resources were used up, and he found himself coveting the pigs’ food (Luke 15:14-19).

The Hebrews writer also explores the purpose of what he calls chastisement in Hebrews 12:4-11. While not all of life’s difficulties are providential efforts to awaken wayward children, evidently there are a significant number of occasions in which a trial is a Divine wake-up call. Based on the experience of Saul, this is a valid principle for both the Christian and the non-Christian. An old farmer was seen approaching his mule with a feed sack in one hand and a two by four in the other. He waited until the animal was not looking, and hit him in the head with the board, then filled the trough. When asked about his tactics, the farmer’s explanation was “I have to get his attention before I feed him!” We would like to think that we are more receptive to being fed than a mule, and we are certain that God has exhausted all other means before resorting to such tactics in order to gain our attention. Unfortunately, few of us are any more attentive than was the mule! Saul would never have requested to be made to suffer blindness on the road to Damascus, but he would certainly later affirm that his chastisement was the best thing that had ever happened to him.

What Saul suffered on the road to Damascus was certainly not pleasant for him. It is important to remember that God had only told him that he must go on to Damascus and there receive information. The text does not inform us of any Divine reassurance

that his eyesight would be restored. It is also significant that Saul was reduced to being led by his companions into Damascus (a humbling and frightening experience) where he spent three days fasting in his personal darkness. During those three days, Saul found little or nothing that would be of comfort to him. We can reasonably presume that they were a miserable three days spent in fearful contemplation of both his body's and spirit's condition. Having at least come to understand that he was not right with God, Saul surely must have been full of sorrow and regret over his sinful life.

It was not just the blindness that was troubling to Saul, it was the fact that he was a spiritually condemned man. We may go so far as to suggest that none are ever saved who have not first reached the painful preceding realization that they are lost. This conversion of the soul is inherently painful, as all changes tend to be to one degree or another. But all of life's changes pale in comparison to the difference in one's life before and after his conversion to Jesus by the Gospel.

It is regrettable that some Christians are more concerned with the injured feelings of the lost than they are with their eternal destiny. Some are critical of plain preaching that offends the sensibilities of the lost. Others are "converting" folks to the church, who claim that they were already saved by some means other than by obedience to the Gospel. Such conversions are a farce. Saul certainly did not make a change from one flawed religious body to another. He first was convicted that to remain as he was would be to stand in rebellion to the eternal God. This is not to excuse those who are unloving, unkind, or offensive in their approach toward sinners. But there are many who prefer that those who are not Christians never be confronted with the unpleasant truth that they are outside of Christ, and thus condemned. No matter how gently this information is presented, there are those who consider it rude to inform a sinner of his condition.

This writer once experienced a similar crisis in one who believed in Jesus but who was a member of a church that Jesus had not built. He was new to this country, and only had recently become acquainted with the church of Christ by having enrolled in Ohio

Valley College. After having been a student for some time, he became quite disturbed by a comment that he had heard from another student. The man in question was watching a Washington Redskins football game, and he remarked that he knew little of the game, but he admired Joe Theisman because he was a Christian. Another student replied, perhaps indelicately, "Joe Theisman is not a Christian, he is a Catholic!" That evening, he stopped by my room and asked me why someone would make such a statement. I had the privilege of teaching him the gospel, which he obeyed a few days later. While there were probably better ways to begin that conversation, but the fact remains that until he learned that his own salvation had been invalid, and that his church membership was unauthorized, he would not have obeyed the gospel. The news he heard was surely quite traumatic from his perspective, but until he received that bad news, he could not obey and commit to the good news. A conversion lacking knowledge of condemnation is a conversion lacking conviction.

The man who had been Saul of Tarsus had to first be broken before he could be spiritually healed. Even more than that, Saul had to die. In this lecture, an attempt has been made to avoid the use of his more familiar name, Paul. But Paul the apostle and Saul of Tarsus had little in common; they were strangers. Saul of Tarsus was mortally wounded on the road to Damascus, though he lingered on for three days before he died and was buried. Would we have labored to save him? If so, we would have erred just as those do today who attempt to preserve the lives of those outside of Christ. This kind of conversion is the result of misplaced compassion, a compassion that discourages the sinner from dying to his present life. We would not advocate unloving, unkind, or calloused condemnations of the lost. But those who are converted must die in the process. Paul himself was inspired to write in Romans 6:6-7, "knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin."



It is significant that Saul was not instructed concerning what to do to be saved on the road to Damascus. In accordance with the command of Jesus in the great commission, the gospel would be heard through faithful men who would have the responsibility of teaching others. Saul of Tarsus, though a chosen vessel of God, was not an exception to that rule. It is interesting that some today claim that God has directly instructed them concerning what they ought to do in order to be saved. Such miraculous messages not only contradict the commands recorded in the Bible, they also violate the Bible pattern of Gospel preaching. There was no need to tell Saul what to do in order to be saved, because the pattern of obedience would be the same for all who would obey it. Furthermore, while a miraculous intervention was needed in order to interrupt Saul's ruinous path of ignorance, there was simply no need for a miraculous revelation of God's plan. That plan had already been miraculously revealed, and there were those who were capable of communicating it. "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us" (2 Cor. 4:7)

When Jesus first appeared to Saul, he calls the disembodied voice "Lord," but asks who He is. Though Jackson argues that "Lord" (*kurios*) is here merely a title of respect resembling "sir" (106), it seems that there is more on his mind than just being polite! Given the circumstances, Saul surely must understand that this is some kind of heavenly phenomenon. One wonders what answer Paul anticipated, since he already believed himself to be a servant of God. Did he believe the answer would be "Jehovah"? As a student of the Old Testament, Paul presumably knew that angels were neither "Lord," nor to be worshiped. Did he already suspect that it might be Jesus? There is no definitive answer to these questions, but the identification of the authoritative Lord and Savior would prove to be the turning point in the conversion of Saul. Until he acknowledged Jesus as both the resurrected one and the glorified Lord, His authority would go unrecognized by Saul.

Saul's recognition of Jesus' authority seems immediate. Once convicted of the Lord's authority, there is an immediate, logical and inevitable question. "Lord, what do you want me to do?" This

question immediately invalidates the damnable doctrine of Calvinism, from which students learn that there is nothing to do, that God requires nothing. If Calvinism is true, Jesus should have replied to Saul's question "There is nothing for you to do other than rejoice that I have saved you."

Paul just as the other sinners in the New Testament who asked what they ought to do, each time were given a sensible answer to that sensible question. Not one was ever told, "Do nothing; just accept the saving grace of Jesus." On Pentecost, broken and pierced hearts motivated sinners to ask "what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). They were given a sensible response to that question. The Philippian jailor asked "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30). He was instructed to believe, and be baptized immediately. Others who asked such questions were also given sensible answers. Nicodemus did not even get to ask the question, but Jesus answered it anyway, telling him to be born again of water and spirit (John 3:3-5).

Perhaps more than any other New Testament writer, Paul's writings are twisted in an effort to prove that salvation can be had apart from obedience to the instructions of the Bible. It is ironic that Paul is thought to support that foolish agenda, when he himself was certainly not saved by grace only apart from obedience. Certainly Paul was a believer in grace, not only the grace that allowed him the opportunity to become a Christian, but the grace of service. "To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph. 3:8). When Saul responded to the instructions of the Lord by going to Damascus and awaiting instructions, this was grace and obedience working as they are designed: hand in hand and in concert. Paul's testimony on the matter to Agrippa is telling. "Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision" (Acts 26:19). Would he have been blessed if he had disregarded Jesus' command? Likewise, could Saul have been saved while disregarding the command relayed to him by Ananias? Acts 22:16 reads, "And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." To be saved apart from being

baptized would logically dictate that he could be saved in his sins, and without calling on the name of the Lord.

The message of salvation preached to Saul presupposed that he would be obedient to it because it, of course, originated with an omniscient Lord. Jesus did not have to assume the Saul would probably do what he ought, but Jesus already knew the outcome. By contrast, note that Paul the apostle frequently preached the gospel to those who would eventually reject it. Why then did he preach to them? Paul, unlike Jesus, was not omniscient. His task was to sow the word, while the choice to obey or not lay with those who received it. It is clear from his exchange with Agrippa that Paul was attempting to convert him. It would prove to be a vain attempt. “Then Agrippa said to Paul, ‘You almost persuade me to become a Christian.’ And Paul said, ‘I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains’” (Acts 26:28-29). Clearly, Paul was preaching to a man for whom he held out hope that he, like Paul himself, would become obedient to the gospel.

The Divine presupposition of Saul’s obedience to the gospel reminds us that a conversion must include an analogous change in behavior. Saul had been chosen particularly, not to receive the gospel, but to be Paul the apostle. All men have been selected for entrance into the kingdom because of the drawing power of the death of Jesus Christ (John 12:32; Heb. 2:9). Saul was no more or no less selected for this blessing open to all. But his reformed submission to Jesus following his conversion completed and validated his conversion. Perhaps there are those through whom God could have done great things in our own time, but who refused to obey the gospel. Perhaps there are those who obeyed the gospel, but who refuse to engage in true service to God as Christians. In neither case can a true conversion be in evidence. Paul would work for Jesus the rest of his days, in part always haunted by his wasted years outside of Christ. He would work out of gratitude for salvation. He would work because his labor for the Lord was what was expected of him. When Saul of Tarsus set out for Damascus, he never really arrived. The man who emerged from

that city was a new creation from above, a man in whose life was proof that men can truly be changed spiritually. “Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God” (Acts 9:20).

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#### **Biographical Sketch**

Dan Kessinger was born in Riverview, MI, the son of gospel preacher Bob (deceased) and Doris Kessinger. He grew up in several states, but is a West Virginian by heritage. He was semi-educated at Walton High School, and received his bachelor’s degree in Bible from Ohio Valley College. He has preached for the Dewey Avenue Church of Christ in St. Marys, WV, for sixteen years, during which time he has conducted a weekly radio program, taught at West Virginia School of Preaching, and is a director of West Virginia Christian Youth Camp. He lectures and conducts several gospel meetings each year, and writes for *West Virginia Christian* and *Gospel Advocate*.

## *Barnabas*

Acts 4:32-37; 9:26-27; 11:22-30; 15:35-41

*Steven Haguewood*

Everyone needs encouragement from time to time. At Freed-Hardeman University is a club called The Barnabas Club. Their self-appointed role is to visit kindness to underprivileged people and help them live better lives. They derived their name from a



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character found in Acts of the apostles named Barnabas. His actual name is Joseph but the apostles called him Barnabas (Acts 4:36). Nicknames are often given for a specific reason and the man Barnabas received his nickname because it fits his character perfectly. Barnabas was a man who shared encouragement to many men including, and especially, the apostle Paul.

Who is the man Barnabas? He was a Levite from the Mediterranean Island of Cyprus. He helps dispel a misconception that Levites did not own land (Jamison, Fausset, and Brown 179). While it is true they received no inheritance, as did the other Jewish tribes upon entrance into the Promised Land, they did receive some cities and were not prohibited from owning property. Joseph, a Levite, was a land-owner. He lived on the island of Cyprus which was in the Mediterranean Sea just south of Cilicia (Hurlbut 112). Tarsus, home of Paul the apostle, was in the province of Cilicia, just 70 miles north of the island of Cyprus, so Paul and Joseph grew up in proximity to one another (Fausett 77). Cyprus was a pagan island known for its worship of Venus, the Roman goddess of fertility and sexual desire (Stein 23). His

family background would, of course, be Jewish since he was a Levite, but he was also familiar with pagan poly-theistic culture, idolatry, and explicit sexuality.

Joseph was called Barnabas by the apostles because he sold his tract of land and laid the money at the feet of the apostles for distribution among the poor. Apparently, after becoming a Christian either at Pentecost or shortly thereafter, Joseph demonstrated Christian love early. The name Barnabas means “son of exhortation or consolation” (Fausset 77). Jamison, Fausset, and Brown point out that selling one's own personal goods to donate to the poor is an attesting of such a namesake as well as standing by Saul when he needed support (179). He insisted on working and it appears that he would not accept monetary compensation for his efforts. “Or do only Barnabas and I not have a right to refrain from working? Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat the fruit of it? Or who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock?” (1 Cor. 9:6-7). J. B. Coffman points out that this text makes clear that Paul and Barnabas both had the right to expect compensation for their labors and each refused (*Corinthians* 130). Paul and Barnabas even had the right to expect support for wives had they brought them along with them and no self-respecting Greek would listen to a teacher who was not compensated for his teaching (Barclay 79). Therefore his work was for the edification of the church and not for personal gain.

Barnabas had an early association with Saul who later became Paul and author of 13 New Testament epistles. Luke first tells of his association in Acts 9:27 in an extended testimony (Jamison, Fausset, and Brown 179). He went with Saul to the apostles and stood with him giving this testimony. He is also with Saul on his first missionary journey which actually began in Cyprus, Barnabas' home (Acts 13-15). Since Saul and Barnabas lived in so close to one another they may have known each other before Acts 9. A. R. Fausset believes they may have gone to school together, at least under Gamaliel, and had some mutual friends (77). While this is conjecture, one would suppose that Barnabas had heard of a man with the social stature Saul acquired. He likely had heard of

Saul even before he perpetrated such a great persecution against the church. At the onset of Saul's second journey Barnabas separated himself from his old friend. He and Saul argued over John Mark. John Mark (Mark) was Barnabas' cousin according to Colossians 4:10. The term *anephion* applied to Mark means “father's brother's son” (Jacobs 405). Barnabas and Mark, cousins, decided to go in a different direction from Saul and Silas, and this is the last mention of Barnabas in Acts. In Acts Barnabas is listed before Saul in each incident where both are listed until Acts 13:43. Following the meeting with Sergius Paulus, Saul is called Paul and his name is most often listed before Barnabas' (405). The significance of this is that Paul's growth has now made him the leader of their missionary efforts.

Some nominate Barnabas as a possible author. He is suggested as the author of Hebrews by Tertullian (Guthrie 674-76). Connection is made between Acts 4:36, the name “son of exhortation” and what the author of Hebrews calls his epistle “this word of exhortation” (Heb. 13:22). The only real drawback to this suggestion is lack of evidence. Barnabas was indeed capable of producing such a work, he is called an apostle (Acts 14:14), and as a Levite he had knowledge of the daily workings of the temple. The evidence is simply not strong enough to affirm his authorship.

Barnabas is credited with authoring *The Epistle of Barnabas*. Some refer to the Epistle of Barnabas as evidence of the canonicity of the Gospel account of John (Guthrie 281). It references John, even if vaguely. The author draws parallel between Moses and the serpent in the wilderness when Moses lifted the bronze serpent in similar fashion to John 3:14 (Roberts and Donaldson 145). Barnabas had friendship with the apostles which would have given him the appropriate age to be a New Testament author (Acts 9:26). He was respected enough to be chosen to go before the apostles on behalf of the Christians at Antioch (Acts 15:2). He was approved by God when the Holy Spirit chose him and Saul to go on their first missionary journey (Acts 13:2). The question arises, did he write this book? The fact that he cites John is evidence against the apostle Barnabas. John likely wrote after Barnabas was already dead. Paul makes no mention of wanting to see Barnabas near the

end of his life (2 Tim. 4:11) A. R. Fausset thinks he likely died shortly after the argument over Mark and that is why there is no mention of him in the rest of Acts (78). To cite John, the book would almost certainly be a second century work. Jacobs in the ISBE ascribed it to a later period, most likely second century (78).

Cleveland Coxe gave good argument against the apostle Barnabas as author of *The Epistle of Barnabas* (Roberts and Donaldson 133-34). The spirit and tone seem opposed to Judaism. Being a former Jew, the tone is harsh toward those who were Jews. Inaccuracies concerning Mosaic enactments and observations, as a Levite he would be more familiar with these customs. The author delivered absurd and trifling interpretations of Scriptures. He actually misquoted Daniel 7:7-8 and 24 and Psalm 51 (508). The author made silly vaunts of knowledge which seem haughty and conceited. He wrote, "I understand many things since the Lord has accompanied me in my way of righteousness" (137). This is not what one would expect from a humble exhorter. Eusebius listed the book as spurious. *The Epistle of Barnabas* seems disingenuous, out of character, and dated too late for authorship by the Barnabas of the Bible. He was more likely the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews than this epistle (Guthrie 476).

Barnabas was a man found in the Bible and that alone makes him special to the modern reader. Attention will now turn to the Bible to find what the inspired writers share with us about the man Barnabas.

Acts 4:36-37 begins the current search for Barnabas. He was named Joseph and renamed Barnabas by the apostles. This passage shares with the reader one reason he was given such an illustrious name. He had a tract of land that belonged to him. He saw others who had need, sold his land, and laid the money at the feet of the apostles for distribution. He was a Jew, a Levite, born on the island of Cyprus which was an important and strategic location (Boles 77). These facts lead one's mind away from generosity, but he was very generous and lived up to the name Barnabas. J. W. McGarvey said of this, "When unity and liberality prevail in a congregation the preaching has greater power because of its greater favor among the people" (80). This was the case here

as the church in Jerusalem, where Barnabas was, grew because of activities such as this.

It is worth noting that Barnabas was reacting to a need, not attempting to develop a new order of society. McGarvey also points out, "This was not the result of a socialistic theorizing or of rules laid down to govern all who sought admission into the new society; but it was the spontaneous expression of the love of God and a man which had taken possession of every heart" (79). Barnabas did not try to make socialists of the Christian society. He simply attempted to help those in need because of the love of God in his heart. He was simply a son of encouragement as his name suggested.

Acts 9:27 is the next opportunity to learn of Barnabas. Here he is introducing Saul to the apostles. He ". . . took hold of him." The term here is *epilabomenos*, lay hold, meaning he pulled Saul aside (Robertson 127). He seems to have pulled Saul aside to get Saul's side of the story. He wanted to hear from Saul's own mouth what happened in Damascus and transpired since that event. Having grown up close to Saul he may have heard that Saul was a man of integrity and wanted to get the truth from the man himself. E. M. Zerr further points out that Cyprus was near Damascus which may have given Barnabas even more opportunity to hear of Saul and his new Christian experience on the Straight Street and his run in with the Jews in Damascus who wished to kill him (307). The disciples seemed to have some mistrust for Saul. McGarvey believes he must have been repelled at his first attempt with Christian fellowship in Jerusalem based on their doubt (188). Barnabas seems to be the first one fully convinced and takes the unpopular position to stand by Saul. He took Saul to the apostles and was respected enough to be heard by them and persuaded them of Saul's sincerity and his conversion to Christ. The son of encouragement took a struggling new Christian under his wing and taught him to fly by simply standing up for him.

Acts 11:19-30 brings about another encounter with Barnabas. The death of Stephen caused a scattering of Christians from Jerusalem to many regions. One region was the island of Cyprus, where some Christians began teaching the word of Christ to the

pagans there. From there a group of men traveled to Antioch. Those in Jerusalem decided to send a delegation to Antioch to support and aid the work of these men. Barnabas was a natural choice to lead such a delegation. He was from Cyprus so he would be familiar with the men doing the mission work. He was a leader in the church in Jerusalem so he was respected and trusted (Robertson 157). His respect was such that Luke heaps lavish praise on him as was reserved for Stephen alone until this point (McGarvey 225). Barnabas was the envoy from Jerusalem to Antioch.

In Antioch he realized that the job was larger than he expected. He needed help and went to Saul to find it. Tarsus was just 80 miles from Antioch so Saul was reachable for Barnabas (Boles 184). Saul was sent back to Tarsus from Jerusalem with the blessings of the apostles for his own good. Barnabas decided not to leave such a potential asset sitting in Tarsus when he could be helping in Antioch. Though Luke does not share all that Barnabas heard of or from Saul since sending him home to Tarsus, he could have likely heard what the Syrians and Celicians heard of him. “He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he once tried to destroy” (Gal 1:23). Whatever the case, he went to get Saul and brought him to Antioch to help in the presentation of the Gospel. He took a novice Christian, developed his skills, and turned him into a Christian tool and a missionary of the greatest sort. That is what a son of encouragement does.

His job while in Antioch was to go to the Gentiles and teach them the truth about Jesus. This is yet another demonstration of his heart and shows that he is not subject to the typical Jewish sectarianism predominant in the first century (Jamison, Fausset, and Brown 188). His message was simple, “Stay true to the Lord” (Acts 11:23). His style is true to his name. He “began to encourage them with resolute heart” (11:23). In true Barnabas style he went above and beyond. He was effective because of his dedication and desire to encourage others, building them up in the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ. As a result of the work of Barnabas and Saul “considerable numbers” were brought to the Lord.

As a result of the work of Barnabas and Saul considerable numbers were taught. The disciples earned a new name, Christians. The first time this word is used in the Bible is in Acts 11:26 referring to the believers in Antioch. The term *christianous* is made up just for this group of people. It is a Greek word that has been made into a Latin style adjective (Robertson 160). It is similar to Caesarianus, a follower of Caesar, and means literally “belonging to.” It showed an association between a person and an ideology or belief system affiliated with someone else (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich 1091). As a result of the teaching of Barnabas and Saul the people associated their students with Christ. That is an accusation to which Christians today ought to aspire. Again Barnabas lived up to his name. “There is no preaching so eloquent as that which sounds out from a whole-hearted benevolence” (McGarvey 230). The church at Antioch decided to repay the favor of sending Barnabas by sending him back with funds to assist the struggling Christians in Jerusalem.

Barnabas later struggled with his commitment to the Gentiles though. Galatians 2:9 says that Barnabas was caught up in the troubles of Peter. Peter had pulled back his fellowship from the Gentiles and began to distance himself from them, not eating with them any more. Paul said that even Barnabas was caught up in this hypocrisy. It was a surprise to Paul that Barnabas was involved with this hypocrisy, but he indeed was. Barnabas showed his human side which is subject to mistakes. Merrill C. Tenney argued that this event may have been precipitous in the separation between Paul and Barnabas that occurred in Acts 15 (90). He further asserted that Barnabas’ friendly nature with the church at Jerusalem may explain or excuse his withdrawal from the Gentiles when the Jews from Jerusalem arrived (90). Coffman called Barnabas’ participation in the withdrawal a “moment of weakness” (*Galatians* 42). This event was likely prior to the discussion in Antioch and subsequent council of Acts 15 in which the decision was made that circumcision was not necessary. Therefore any slip in character in Barnabas was indeed temporary in nature.

Acts 13 introduces the reader to the first missionary journey of Barnabas and Saul. Barnabas and Saul took John Mark with them

from Antioch back to Jerusalem to deliver the money. While there the Holy Spirit told the church to set apart Barnabas and Saul. They went from Antioch to the island of Cyprus, home island of Barnabas and traveled across Cyprus from Salamis to Paphos. This would cover the island from east to west (Hurlbut 112). This statement would be similar to saying, “From New York to Los Angeles” in reference to the United States. In Paphos they meet Bar-Jesus and Serguis Paulus. After speaking with Serguis Paulus a shift is noticed in the character of the two companions. Saul is now referred to as Paul and the group that was once Barnabas and Saul becomes Paul and Barnabas. This shift is significant as Paul emerges from this point forward as the dominant personality and Barnabas seems to become the helper.

Paul and Barnabas travel to Antioch of Pisidia, a different Antioch from Acts 11 (Antioch of Syria). Seemingly insignificant is Acts 13:13 which states that Mark left them at Perga to return to Jerusalem. No reason is given and Luke did not elaborate. The cycle of Jewish rejection, Gentile acceptance and Jewish persecution begins here in Antioch of Pisidia. The Jews rejected the words they spoke thereby judging themselves “unworthy of eternal life” so they turned to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46).

In Lystra they healed a man who was lame from birth. The natives call for them to be worshipped. They call Barnabas Zeus and Paul Hermes. This may also represent the shift in dominant characters. Zeus was the main Greek god but Hermes was the spokesman of the gods, indicating that Paul was the one most people heard (Robertson 210). That they intended to worship these men was evident by the garland on the oxen. The oxen were ready for sacrifice to the gods when they were prepared and decorated with garland. All the preparations were complete and the sacrifice was imminent (Bullinger 666). The pagans in Lystra were going to make a sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas whom they considered gods. As a result, Baranbas and Saul tore their robes, the last time this was done in the Bible (McGarvey 42). Tearing the garments, robe/cloak, was an act of agitation as a result of a typically unexpected event. It was a sign of distress or disappointment in which these two men partook. They refused to be worshipped, as

men ought to do. Instead they used this as a teaching opportunity to share with those in Lystra about the “Living God” whom they served. Contrast is made by Paul and Barnabas between God and the inanimate idols the pagan society served. Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and stoned Paul leaving him to die. Barnabas took his friend to Derbe; they preached there and returned to all the cities in which they had preached before encouraging them to continue in the faith (Acts 14:22). Even though his life was in potential jeopardy, Barnabas went on encouraging others.

Paul and Barnabas made their way back to Antioch, where they began their mission work, and found there some Judaizing Christians who insisted that circumcision was essential for entrance into the kingdom of Christ (Acts 15:1). After some argument and discussion Paul and Barnabas brought their story to Jerusalem to meet with James and the apostles concerning the Judaizers. A council was convened to discuss the matter and give a binding opinion concerning circumcision in the church. It was determined that circumcision was not necessary to Christianity.

This council does not give authority to the church for conventions in which the interpretation of the Scripture is debated and dictated. The council here does not form a biblical basis for an ecclesiastical council, convention, assembly, or synod (McGarvey 42). This is not considered a binding example for the following reasons. The men involved had divine inspiration and revelation from God (Gal. 2:9). Additionally, it was apostolic authority that made the council binding (Boles 2354). The council involved original apostles, none of whom live today. The absence of apostolic authority today makes such a meeting absolutely impossible for any time other than the first century.

The decision was not taken lightly by the council. They prayed about it and discussed it at length. Then they wrote their decision out, mostly by the hand of James, the half brother of Jesus. The decision needed deliverance and thus needed a delivery team. Paul and Barnabas were the natural selection once again as they had brought the issue to Jerusalem. The two of them took along two others, Judas who is called Barsabbas and Silas. Their primary destination was Antioch where they delivered the letter to a warm

and friendly reception among the Gentile Christians who did not desire circumcision.

Judas was sent away in peace, meaning the Christians at Antioch sent him home on friendly terms. Silas may have stayed or he may have gone with Judas. “But it seemed good to Silas to remain there” (Acts 15:34) does not have much support for inclusion into the scriptures. Bruce Metzger in his *Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* gives an [A] reading to its exclusion because most manuscripts do not contain the verse and the ones which contain it, C and Textus Receptus, contain varied readings (388). It appears as though a copyist felt it necessary to explain Silas’ presence for Paul’s selection as a traveling companion.

From Antioch, Paul and Barnabas decided to retrace their steps from the first missionary journey and encourage the churches which started under their guidance and teaching. Ever the encourager, Barnabas wanted to take his cousin John Mark on this second journey. Paul argued against taking him since he left the company on their first journey. Paul did not relent and agreed to take John Mark along. Barnabas refused to leave him behind. Instead the two men chose different partners, went to the originally intended congregations and encouraged them in the Gospel. Paul chose Silas; this is the reason for inclusion of Acts 15:34. The two of them went to Syria and Cilicia. Barnabas took John Mark with him and they sailed away to Cyprus to strengthen the churches there. Though they separated, both men went about encouraging the church. Luke made no more mention of Barnabas.

Barnabas had a tremendous impact on the first century church. He helped get Paul started. As a struggling new Christian, Paul could not find the fellowship for which he longed. He tried and was rejected by the Christians to whom he went because of his reputation as a former persecutor of the church. His reputation preceded his Christianity as even Ananias was hesitant to go to him and tell him what he must do. Humans demonstrate a tendency toward skepticism and the early Christians were skeptical of Saul. Even the apostles were slow to accept Saul. But Barnabas put his arm of fellowship around Saul, introduced him to his fellow Christians and placed a stamp of approval on him. From that point

on, Saul was accepted as a Christian and others heard only that the one who formerly persecuted the church now preaches the faith he once tried to destroy (Gal. 1:23). Barnabas helped give us Saul.

Barnabas had an important influence on the apostles. He showed them that a good heart is possible in a man of integrity and knowledge. They listened to his appraisal of Saul because they had seen his dedication to the Christian faith. They witnessed his devotion when he sold his land and gave the money to the apostles for distribution among the poor. They heard him speak and knew that he loved the Lord. They knew of his desire to comfort and encourage others. When he came to them with Saul it probably was no surprise that Barnabas was pleading his case since he was already known as the son of encouragement.

He started Saul’s missionary habits. Saul was in Tarsus trying to determine how to best serve this new way to which he was now committed. He was not one who would be silent or still but was active in whatever endeavor he chose to work. Church work would be no exception; but it appears that Saul was uncertain how to proceed. Barnabas brought him from Tarsus to Antioch and introduced him to mission work. His introduction of Saul to mission life became infectious to Saul who spent much of his Christian life on the move from city to city proclaiming the Gospel of Christ. The son of encouragement encouraged Saul to be a missionary and helped change many lives through the work of Saul, his protégé.

Barnabas showed many people how to be a Christian before he ever taught them. He demonstrated Christian love through the first act Luke recorded about him. His introduction to the reader is his act of giving the price of his land to help the needy Christians in Jerusalem. Barnabas was a living illustration of the truth, “Actions speak louder than words.” People were able to listen to Barnabas because they knew that he believed and practiced the things he preached to them.

Barnabas was an early apostle. The term apostle is applied to Barnabas in Acts 14:14 when he and Paul were worshipped by those in Lystra. It refers to a messenger or an envoy, one sent in behalf of someone else for a specific purpose (Bauer, Danker,



Arndt, and Gingrich 122). This term aptly applies to Barnabas in that he was sent in many instances by someone else for the purpose of teaching the Gospel and encouraging the church. He was also an envoy of the Holy Spirit, “set apart for the work” He wanted Barnabas and Saul to do (Acts 13:2). He was not an apostle in the same sense as the original twelve along with Paul. They received the full measure of the Holy Spirit and the ability to impart the gifts, which gifts were not available to anyone else. There is no record of this happening for Barnabas. But he was an envoy of the Holy Spirit and of the apostles who sent him to Antioch to assist those in Antioch. Barnabas was not made an apostle by miraculous events such as an upper room mighty rushing wind or a Damascus road experience. Barnabas made himself an apostle by living the life of encouragement and Christian love, devotion, and teaching to which the Holy Spirit calls all men. Each Christian can be an apostle according to the order of Barnabas by lending encouragement to the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

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#### Biographical Sketch

Steven Haguewood is minister for North End Church of Christ in Parkersburg, WV. He has served the congregation there since December 2007. He is a graduate of Freed-Hardeman University with a BS in Bible and an MA in New Testament. He has been a located preacher for seven years and served as a fill in preacher since he was 16 years old.

# *The Persecution of the Apostles*

Acts 4:13-31; 5:17-42

*Eddie Cooper*

It is truly an honor and a humbling experience to be asked to speak on this great lectureship. The opportunity afforded to me to study the materials provided, and to present them, with the desire that the gospel will be spread far and wide, has been a rich and



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rewarding experience. My prayer is that it will help all who read this material to become more fully aware of all that the apostles went through for the Lord's sake.

Imagine what it must have been like to have been selected to be an apostle of Jesus Christ. To be a part of that inner circle, to be with Jesus during His personal ministry, to hear His great lessons and see them unfold in the lives of those who were His followers. Yet, many failed to comprehend what was expected of the disciples of Jesus. It is also apparent from a study of the book of Acts that there were many, other than the apostles, who underwent persecution, even to the point of death for what they believed.

## **Definitions**

In order for us to understand what we are discussing, it would be well for us to define the terms. "Persecution is the suffering or pressure, mental, moral, or physical, which authorities, individuals, or crowds inflict on others, especially for opinions or beliefs, with a view to their subjection by recantation, silencing, or as a last resort, execution" (Bromiley 771). The word *apostle* means one

sent forth as a messenger. According to the book of Acts, they were those chosen by Jesus and trained in order to send them on a specific mission: the establishment of the church by evangelism and the spreading of the “good news.”

Matthew 10:2-4 gives the names of the apostles. They are: “Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew, his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus; Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him.”

Of course, Judas betrayed Jesus, (Acts 1:15-19) and lots were cast to select another apostle, and “they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles” (Acts 1:26). Paul, was “called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures . . .” (Rom. 1:1-2).

### **Persecution Was Inevitable**

Persecution was frequently foretold by Christ, as certain to come to those who were His true disciples and followers. He forewarned them again and again that it was inevitable, and that He Himself must suffer it. “From that time forth began Jesus to show unto His disciples, how he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day” (Matt. 6:21). Notice in verse 22 the response given by Peter. “Now while they were staying in Galilee, Jesus said to them, ‘The Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him, and the third day He will be raised up.’ And they were exceedingly sorrowful” (Matt. 17:22-23). It appears in the New Testament that some, even among the apostles were not comprehending what really was to happen to them by way of persecution.

In the parable of the Sower, one great lesson we learn is that persecution would be a test of true discipleship. Mark 4:17 says, “and they that have no root in themselves, so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the word’s sake, immediately they stumble” (offended, KJV). If one

was to undergo persecution, this would truly be a test of discipleship, in any age.

Persecution would also be a means of gaining a blessing. The blessings came to those who endured persecution and our Lord speaks of this in the Beatitudes, especially in Matthew 5:10-12: “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” It would take different forms, ranging from false accusation to the infliction of death (Matt. 10:28; Luke 12:4).

The methods of persecution employed by the Jews and heathen were these: (1) Men would revile them and would say all manner of evil against them falsely, for Christ’s sake (Matt. 5:11). (2) Contempt and disparagement (John 8:48; Matt. 10:25). (3) They would be forcibly separated from other believers, expelled from the synagogues and other assemblies for the worship of God (Luke 6:22; John 16:2). (4) Illegal arrest and death itself. All of these various methods were foretold, and all came to pass. Jesus often forewarned the disciples of the severity of persecution which they would need to encounter if they were faithful to Him. Read Matthew 23:34: “Therefore, indeed I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city.”

### **Persecution Existed in Old Testament Times**

It must not be thought that persecution only existed in New Testament times. According to what Jesus said, “Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets” (Matt. 23:31). The Pharisees were showing themselves heirs to their fathers who had persecuted the righteous.

In the period between the close of the Old Testament and the coming of Christ, there was protracted suffering by the Jews, because of their refusal to embrace idolatry, and of their fidelity to the Mosaic Law and worship of God.

### **Some Reasons for Persecution**

As we study the book of Acts, we are made aware of many reasons for the persecution that came upon the apostles. Here are a few: (1) Disenchantment with the Lord's message. (2) There were religious leaders, such as the chief priests, scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees, who hated Jesus. (3) Some wanted to discredit the messengers. (4) The cost of Christianity was more than the persecutors wanted to pay. (5) There was no compromise with other faiths. (6) The enemies could detect that disciples "had been with Jesus." "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13).

It was no accident that persecution should arise. It was the necessary consequence of the principles embodied in the heathen Roman government, when these came into contact and conflict with the essential principles of the Christian faith.

Here are the reasons for persecution in the Roman Empire: (1) Political—once Rome realized that Christianity was not a sect of Judaism, it persecuted Christians as outlaws. They were also considered atheists because they refused to worship the gods of Greek and Roman polytheism. To worsen matters, after the Roman emperors considered themselves deified, the Christian refusal to worship the emperor was styled as treason. (2) On account of the claim which the Christian faith makes, and which it cannot help making, to the exclusive allegiance of the heart and of the life (Rutherford 2326). "Jesus said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Matt. 22:37-39).

After our Lord's resurrection, the first attacks against His disciples came from the high priest and his associates. The high-priesthood was then in the hands of the Sadducees, and one reason which moved them to action was their "being greatly disturbed" because the apostles proclaimed in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. Acts 4:2 states: "being greatly disturbed that they taught the

people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead." Cf. Acts 5:14. Instead of yielding to the evidence of the fact that the resurrection had taken place, they opposed and denied it, and persecuted the disciples. Notice in this section of Acts, that it was the religious leaders who were upset that Peter and John were teaching the people and were at variance with the message, but the result was that many heard the word and believed (cf. Acts 2:41).

The preaching of the gospel shortly after the church was established had two results: (1) The apostles Peter and John were imprisoned; (2) about 5,000 men plus women believed and were added to the church by the Lord (Acts 4:1-4). Shortly after this event, the leaders threatened the disciples and commanded them not to preach Jesus. The apostles, without fear, affirmed before the council that they would continue their preference of the Word of God to the commandments of men and would continue to preach the Gospel. Notice:

"But so that it spreads no further among the people, Let us severely threaten them, that from now on they speak to no man in this name." So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way of punishing them, because of the people, since they all glorified God for what had been done. (Acts 4:17-21)

In Acts 4:23-31, Peter and John reported all that had been said to them. The disciples with one accord lift up their voice in prayer to God and prayed for boldness to speak God's Word. Acts 4:29 records: "Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word."

## Persecution Arises Again

In Acts 5, we have the high priest arresting and imprisoning the apostles. The angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and told them to go speak. Word reaches the high priest that these prisoners were standing in the temple and teaching the people. The apostles were brought before the council. Notice the charge against the apostles in Acts 5:27ff: “And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest asked them, saying, ‘Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And, look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man’s blood on us!’ But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: ‘We ought to obey God rather than men’” (Acts 27:29). They had filled Jerusalem with the doctrine and were trying to bring Jesus’ blood upon the council, or make them bear the guilt. Peter’s defense was yes, they had not obeyed the council, they were guilty of killing Jesus, but God exalted Jesus to be a Prince and Savior. In verse 33, we find that the council was furious and plotted to kill them.

A man named Gamaliel, a Pharisee, doctor of the Law; a man of great reputation (Acts 22:3) suggests that the council leave these men alone. His point: **If the work of these men be only of man, it will come to nothing; if it be of God, there is no way we can overcome it.** “So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ” (Acts 5:41-42).

Paul often confronted opponents of the Gospel in Acts 13. Paul performed the miracle of healing a lame man. As a result of this miracle, the people raised their voices, and cried out, “the gods have come down to us in the likeness of men” (Acts 14:11). Barnabas and Paul tried to explain that they were not gods, but the multitudes could “scarcely refrain themselves from sacrificing to them” (Acts 14:18). “The Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead’ (Acts 14:19).

In Acts 16 one can read of the beating and imprisonment of Paul and Silas. Acts 18:12-17 depicts an assault upon Paul and the intervention of a Roman official, he was released. Acts 21 gives another account of Paul being assaulted and captured by a mob (vv. 27-31), and then delivered from the mob and arrested by Roman soldiers (vv. 31-35). Paul was even smitten on the mouth at the command of the high priest (Acts 23:2), when he was brought before the Sanhedrin. Then to top it all off we find his murder plotted (23:14), for which cause he was moved to Caesarea where he was left imprisoned by Felix for two years (Acts 24:27). Paul remained in prison under the rule of Festus, but later he was sent to Rome according to his appeal, whereupon he was shipwrecked (Acts 27:41).

This brings to our attention Paul summarizing the things through which he was caused to go for the sake of his discipleship.

Are they ministers of Christ? I speak as a fool—I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils of the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. (2 Cor. 11:23-28)

## How the Apostles Died

According to extra-biblical tradition, the apostles died as follows (Fox 2-5):

- Peter was crucified upside-down.

- James, the son of Zebedee was beheaded, the first of the twelve to die.
- John, the son of Zebedee, died of natural causes due to old age. An
- Andrew, Peter's brother, was crucified upon a diagonal or X-shaped cross.
- Philip was crucified.
- Bartholomew was flayed alive and then beheaded.
- Matthew was killed by a sword wound.
- Thomas was killed by a spear.
- James, son of Alphaeus, was thrown down from the temple by the scribes and Pharisees; was then stoned, and his brains dashed out with a fuller's club.
- Simon was crucified or sawn in half.
- Judas Iscariot hanged himself after betraying Jesus.
- Paul was beheaded with a sword in Rome. As a Roman citizen, he was exempt from crucifixion.
- It is evident that the disciples knew that their lives were in peril, but they were willing to pay whatever costs were necessary to remain faithful to the Lord.

### How Can We Make Application?

2 Timothy 3:12 says: "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." David Lipscomb penned in his commentary, "This truth is universal. A man that is faithful to God in all things will be opposed and persecuted. The persecution takes different forms in different ages and countries" (234-35).

Perhaps the following excerpt from Albert Barnes is in order:

It follows from this: (1) that they who make a profession of religion, should come prepared to be persecuted. It should be considered as one of the proper qualifications for membership in the church, to be WILLING to bear persecution, and to RESOLVE not to shrink from any duty in order to avoid it. (2) They who ARE persecuted for their opinions, should consider that this MAY BE evidence that they have the spirit of Christ, and are true friends. They

should remember that, in this respect, they are treated as the Master was, and are in the goodly company of the prophets, apostles, and martyrs; for they were ALL persecuted. Yet, (3) if we are persecuted, we should carefully inquire, before we avail ourselves of this consolation, whether we are persecuted BECAUSE we "live godly in Christ Jesus," or for some other reason. (4) **Let those of us who have never been persecuted in any way, inquire whether it is not an evidence that they have no religion.** If they had been more faithful, and more like their Master, would they have always escaped? And may not their freedom from it prove that they have surrendered the principles of their religion, where they should have stood firm, though the world were arrayed against them? It is easy for a professed Christian to avoid persecution, if he YIELDS every point in which religion is opposed to the world. (237-38)

### Conclusion

Peter by inspiration gives us some things that we may expect as Christians:

- (1) Grieved by various trials. 1 Peter 1:6 declares: "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials."
- (2). When we do good and suffer, we know that we are called to this, just as others. 1 Peter 2:20-21 says: "For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps."
- (3) We will be blessed when we suffer for righteousness' sake. 1 Peter 3:14 reads: "But even if

you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed.”

- (4) It is better that we suffer for doing good than for evil according to 1 Peter 3:17: “For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.”
- (5) We should not be surprised concerning any fiery trial. 1 Peter 4:12 says: “Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you.”

The apostles were continually threatened and pressured to deny their Lord during their ministries and especially as they faced torture and martyrdom. However, none of these men who spent time with Jesus chose to save their lives by denying their faith in Him.

This proves to any fair-minded observer that these men possessed an absolute, unshakeable knowledge about the truth of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Each of the apostles was called upon to pay the ultimate price to prove their faith in Jesus, affirming with his life's blood that Jesus was the true Messiah, the Son of God, and the only hope of salvation for sinful humanity.

Persecution made Christ very near and very precious to those who suffered. Many of the martyrs bore witness even when in the midst of the most cruel torments, that they felt no pain, but that Christ was with them. Instances to his effect could be multiplied. Persecution made them feel how Christ's words were, that even as He was not of the world, so they also were not of it. If they had been of the world, the world would love its own, but because Christ has chosen them out of the world, therefore the world hated them. They were not greater than their Lord. If men had persecuted Jesus, they would also persecute His true

disciples. But though they were persecuted, they were of good cheer; Christ had overcome the world; He was with them; He enabled them to be faithful unto death. He had promised them the crown of life.” (Rutherford 2328)

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#### Biographical Sketch

Eddie was born April 23, 1946 to Denver and Florence Cooper. On September 2, 1966, he married Barbara Buckley of Parkersburg, WV. They have two sons: Jason of Crestview, FL. He is a psychologist. His wife, Martha Mester, is from Nashville, TN. They met at Lipscomb University. She has completed her Master's Degree. They have one son, Ryan. Scott lives in Portland, TN. He is the Chief Financial Officer and manager for Tennessee Farmers Co-Op in Nashville, TN. He is married to Leah Hood, whom he met while attending Freed-Hardeman University. They have one son, Austin, and one daughter, Annamarie.

Eddie is a graduate of St. Marys High School, St. Marys, WV in 1964, a graduate of Ohio Valley College, with an Associate of Science Degree in Bible in 1966, and a graduate of Abilene Christian University with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Bible in 1969.

He has worked with congregations in Ohio—Veto, Pennsville, Hanoverton, Sardis and Chillicothe. In West Virginia, he has

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He has served as a counselor, teacher, director and board member of Northwestern Ohio Christian Youth Camp; teacher and board member of West Virginia Christian Youth Camp, in Pennsboro, WV. He has directed and taught in Training For Christian Service in Fairmont, WV. He has also conducted Singing Schools in West Virginia and Ohio.

He has done radio and TV work and written articles for *Teenage Christian*, *Bible Herald*, *Gospel Truths*, *Gospel Advocate*, *Therefore Stand*, *Christian Bible Teacher*, *West Virginia Christian*, and *Upon the Rock*.

## *The Ethiopian*

Acts 8:26-39

*Jefferson A. Sole*

The book of Acts was written by Luke, an inspired man of God, for the purpose of accurately recording the growth of the early church. It is for this reason the reader is exposed to the successes and failures of some to accept the Gospel of Christ and to become



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part of the Lord's church. It thus becomes a living "textbook" (Jackson 7), just as relevant today as it was nearly 2000 years ago, ". . . on how to become a Christian" (7). While not all agree that this is the purpose of the Book of Acts, McGarvey supported this view:

Much the greater part of Acts may be resolved into a detailed history of cases of conversion, and of unsuccessful attempts at the conversion of sinners. If we extract from it all cases of this kind, with the facts and incidents preparatory to each and immediately consequent upon it, we will have exhausted almost the entire contents of the narrative. All other matters are merely incidental. (4)

While Acts is a detailed history of the cases of conversion, it is not an entirely comprehensive record of the growth of the early church, for Luke chose to document that which "occurred in Palestine, Syria, Asia Minor, Macedonia and Greece and Rome, but omits what happened elsewhere" (Kistemaker 4). Nevertheless



what Luke did record is comprehensive and accurate, with details that impress even the most skeptical scholars such as the late Sir William Ramsay whom upon further study concluded, “that Luke’s history is unsurpassed in respect of its trustworthiness” (81). The reliability of Luke’s account coupled with undoubtedly important subject matter allows readers to know with surety the history of the early church, and provides Christians a pattern to follow as they attempt to fulfill that which they have been commissioned to do, namely, bring lost souls to Christ (Mark 16:16).

As it was noticed above, the book of Acts in its entirety bears witness to the successes and failures of the early church; but in Acts Chapter 8, Luke’s record is almost entirely positive, if not for a small diversion. It is here that Luke first introduces Saul, who unknowingly, was responsible, at least in part, for the spread of the Gospel through relentless opposition to the Christian movement (Acts 8:1-3). Opposition had caused Christians to be “scattered abroad” (Acts 8:1), but not without their faith, for Luke records that they, “went every where preaching the word” (Acts 8:4). It was this very opposition that pushed Philip into the city of Samaria where he preached Christ (Acts 8:5). This proved to be a fertile work for Philip. The Samaritans were not only receptive to the Gospel which he preached (Acts 8:6), but also to the miracles which he performed (Acts 8:7-8), and both accomplished their purposes of producing obedient faith (Acts 8:12). Among those that obeyed the Gospel was Simon (Acts 8:13), a man entrenched in trickery (Acts 8:9), who even after his baptism was so enthralled with the apostles’ ability to convey the Holy Spirit tried to purchase their power (Acts 8:18-19). Simon’s attempt incited a strong rebuke from Peter (Acts 8:20-23) and ultimately lead to a request that the apostles pray on his behalf (Acts 8:24). The account given concerning Simon seems to be only a small diversion, though a serious one, from the greater emphasis of the successful expansion of the church into the previously untapped city of Samaria, for the two apostles continued to preach in the villages of Samaria as they returned to Jerusalem (Acts 8:25).

Luke continued to document the success of the Gospel in Acts (8:26-40), but in this instance success was achieved on a more

personal level with the conversion of a man from Ethiopia. Bock offered this insight, “Whereas up to now mass conversion has been in view, our next three scenes contain individual conversions (the eunuch, Saul, Cornelius). This is the more personal side of evangelism” (338). Because of the personal nature of the conversion of the Ethiopian, these verses become increasing relevant to men today. It is unlikely that one Christian will ever be afforded the opportunity to relay the Gospel of Christ to thousands of individuals on one occasion, but the opportunity to speak to just one individual about Christ is an opportunity afforded to Christians daily. For this reason, the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch becomes, as Reese called it, a “pattern conversion” (330) for daily use. Reese continued, “All the conversions follow a certain pattern; and the pattern is very clearly delineated in these following verses, which makes them especially helpful today when we would tell someone what to do to be saved” (330). Indeed a pattern of conversion has been recorded, which should be followed by Christians and non-Christians alike, that will produce growth in the church today. The remainder of this study will be dedicated to an exposition of the pattern recorded in history with regard to the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch. In doing so, we will consider the pattern established in: (1) Philip, who played the role of converter; (2) the Ethiopian, who played the role of the converted; (3) the method of conversion, which ultimately lead to the inclusion of the Ethiopian into the kingdom of heaven.

### **The Pattern of the Converter**

Philip is introduced to the reader in Acts chapter 6 as one of seven men chosen by the congregation, and appointed by the apostles, to “serve tables” (v. 2). The fact that Philip was chosen proves that Philip was a man “of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom” (6:3, 5), making him a perfect candidate to help preach to those outside of Christ. Philip taught by way of example, first, that in order to be an effective teacher of God’s Word *one must be a worthy representative of the Gospel of Christ* (Philip. 1:27; Eph. 4:1). Philip is not mentioned again until Luke detailed his work in Samaria (Acts 8:5-25), with the man from

Ethiopia (Acts 8:26-39), and his subsequent work in Azotus and cities on the way to Caesarea (Acts 8:40). The only other instance in which Philip is mentioned is when he provided housing for Paul and his company (Acts 21:8).

In verse 26, the angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, “. . . Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza” (26b). Philip, most likely still in Samaria, was instructed to go *south* on a road that connected Jerusalem with Gaza. Some, such as Kistemaker, have noted that the word translated *south* could also be translated *at midday* (311), such is evidenced in Acts 22:6, but context seems to favor the former. There have been several roads suggested as the possible route in which Philip would have taken from Jerusalem to Gaza, none of which are conclusive, but the text does indicate that it was a desert. For this reason, it is reasonable to conclude, as Roper did, “The one indicated by Luke was probably the road least traveled” (301). The word translated *desert* has lead some to believe that their surroundings would have been a barren waste, void of any water. Yet the word is not always translated in this manner as evidenced in Matthew 14:15, 19; Mark 6:35, 39; John 6:10 and “no such waste has ever existed between Jerusalem and Gaza” (McGarvey 150). Gaza is one of the most ancient cities mentioned in the Bible and served as a marker for the boundary of the Canaanities (Gen. 10:19). It is grammatically possible that the phrase “which is a desert,” which is most commonly taken to reference “the road,” could refer to Gaza (Bruce 186). Recorded history by Josephus (Antiquities XIII. III; XIV. IV) indicates that there was a city known as “desert Gaza” which included the remains of Gaza after it was destroyed in 93 BC and a “new Gaza” was built in a slightly different location in 57 BC by order of the Roman general Pompey (Boles 133; Bruce 186; Kistemaker 311). Still, it is preferred to consider the phrase as a modifier of “the road” because, as Kistemaker correctly acknowledged, “The emphasis in the account falls not on cities (Jerusalem and Gaza) but on the Ethiopian official who by reading Scripture becomes a Christian. And Philip meets him along a seldom-traveled road” (311).

Luke continued in verse 27, after the angel of the Lord commanded Philip, “he arose and went” (27a). Implied in the text, Philip issued no complaint and showed no hesitation to the command given to him by God through His angel. There could have been several rebuttals issued by Philip; after all, was he not already doing a good work in Samaria? Was the Gospel which he preached not having success? Was his preaching not effective to the point that many dedicated themselves to the Lord in baptism? All of these would have been reasonable questions for Philip to ask, and all of them would most certainly have been answered in the affirmative. With humility, Philip resisted not the command of the Lord and “he arose and went” (27a). At this point Philip had no indication as to the purpose for which he was to follow a deserted road that lead from Jerusalem to Gaza, yet he had enough faith in God to obey Him. Philip demonstrated, second, that in order to be an effective teacher of God’s Word *one must be willing to obey His Word without hesitation or rebuttal*. The command from God to preach and teach His Word is clearly stated (Mark 16:15; Matt. 28:19-20), and our obedience to this command is not contingent upon anything, including the perceived success or failure of one’s current endeavors. If Philip had not seen any success in Samaria and offered rebuttal to God because of discouragement, would he have been justified? Most certainly not, and neither are we if we spurn the command of God to preach the Word whether in season or out of season (2 Tim. 4:2). Reese expounded, “It would take some faith on the part of Philip to leave the promising field in Samaria and go to a road which did not even pass through any villages in its whole length from Jerusalem to Gaza. But God had spoken, and off he went!” (332). Indeed, faith was needed for Philip to heed the commands of God without hesitation or rebuttal and his faith is soon rewarded by a passerby from Ethiopia.

While Philip traveled the deserted road in faith he had not yet been given any explanation concerning the purpose of his trip. As a man approached him in a chariot, Philip received further instruction in the form of a command. This time the Spirit said to Philip, “Go near, and join thyself to this chariot” (29). Again Philip is instructed by God, but this time God used the Spirit to speak His

message rather than an angel. While there has been considerable debate about the significance of the apparent change in messenger, one point that cannot be overlooked is that it is God that is directing Philip. Roper wrote, “Luke was probably not making a major point in naming an angel as the speaker one time and the Spirit the next. Luke’s point was that *God* directed Philip” (301). God, through the Spirit, tells Philip to *join* himself with the chariot, a term “that pictures ‘to be glued to.’ Evidently the spirit wants Philip to walk (or run) alongside the chariot, and stay with it” (Reese 334). Imagine for a moment being instructed by God to approach what looked to be a high ranking official, from a foreign land, who was reading audibly as he travelled a deserted road. Many of us would have had reservations about approaching this man, perhaps to the point that we would not have fulfilled God’s request at all and stood idle as this man passed us by. Perhaps we would have had these questions, or similar ones, rapidly going through our minds, “If this man wanted to be bothered, why is he traveling on a deserted road? Is it not rude to interrupt someone that is reading? Do you not think he will get angry if I interrupt? If he is a high ranking official what right do I have to approach him? Even if I told him the truth, what are the odds a man of great authority would listen? You see, we often look for excuses to justify our cowardliness and we are usually very successful to find them. Philip did not allow himself to fall victim to his own insecurities; rather “Philip ran thither to him” (30a). Philip exhibited, third, that in order to be an effective teacher of God’s Word *one must be bold with the Gospel of Christ*. Henry wrote, “We should study to do good to those we light in company with upon the road: thus the lips of the righteous may feed many. We should not be so shy of all strangers as some affect to be. Of those whom we know nothing else we know this, that they have souls” (84). Every Christian has been commanded by God to teach His Word (Mark 16:15; Matt. 28:19-20), and the Word is powerful (Heb. 4:12; Rom. 1:16) and lacks nothing (2 Tim. 3:17), therefore it deserves to be taught with boldness (Acts 13:46).

As Philip approached, he heard the man reading from the prophet Isaiah and asked him, “Understandest thou what thou readest?” (v.

30c). Philip did not begin with an introduction or small talk, but with a question that upon first glance seems peculiar. One must admit, this is not the way that one would typically approach a stranger, and it would certainly be deemed inappropriate when religious matters are going to be discussed. Still as McGarvey wrote, it was actually a very appropriate question:

It was, however, an appropriate question, and wisely propounded. Philip as yet knew not this man; he knew not whether to approach him as a fellow disciple, or as an unbeliever. He knew that if he was an unbeliever he could not tell the meaning of the well known prediction which he was reading, one of the plainest predictions in all the prophets concerning the sufferings of Christ. (154)

In other words, the text seems to imply, Philip used a question to determine how he was going to effectively teach this individual. As Reese put it, “One of the first things to be done whenever a prospect is met, is to find out where he is on the road to salvation” (335). Questions can often be used to determine the hearts of men, a technique that Christ practiced (Matt. 16:13-20; etc.), and Philip used here. Thankfully, this man possessed a heart that would be likened to the “good ground” (Matt. 13:8, 23) in the Parable of the Soils. He recognized that he needed help to understand the contents of Isaiah 53 and Philip proceeded to teach him, apparently, on a level that he could understand. Philip established by example, fourth, that in order to be an effective teacher of God’s Word *one must be able to gauge the prospect’s level of understanding and then teach at that level*. Too often, teachers of God’s Word, many times unknowingly, spend the majority of a teaching opportunity demonstrating to others how much knowledge they have of the Scripture rather than actually teaching others the Scripture. An effective teacher is not one that confounds his listeners but enlightens them with simplicity on even the most difficult portions of the Bible.

Upon reading Isaiah 53:7-8 the man asked “of whom speaketh the prophet this? Of himself, or some other man?” (v. 34b). There

would have been several ways to approach this question, but Luke recorded that, “Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus” (v. 35). Philip began his teaching in Isaiah 53, which is a prophecy concerning Christ’s sacrificial death, and continued to preach to him concerning Jesus. Isaiah 53:7-8 served as the foundation for Philip to build upon and he continued to preach to his prospect concerning the foundation of the church (1 Cor. 3:11). Based upon the prospect’s response upon seeing water, it is clear that Philip did not just preach *about* Jesus but preached “Christ crucified” (1 Cor. 1:23). There are plenty of men that teach *about* Jesus as a historical figure, but few actually preach Jesus. To preach Jesus means that one not only acknowledges that He existed and made an extraordinary impact on the world as we know it, but also that He is the Son of God and His commands must be obeyed. What exactly Philip preached is not recorded but based on the content of his sermon in Samaria, Roper wrote:

As Philip had preached Jesus to the Samaritans, he had not merely preached about Jesus. He had also preached on how each individual could benefit from what Jesus did for mankind: He had preached on the kingdom (church), the name of Jesus Christ, and baptism (8:5, 12). That Philip’s message to the treasurer contained the same themes is obvious from the official’s response. (307)

The pattern left by Philip proves, fifth, that in order to be an effective teacher of God’s Word *one must determine what is important to the prospect, and use it as a foundation to preach Jesus.*

After having preached Jesus, his prospect understood the need to be baptized, and Philip baptized him. Evidently, included in the broad subject of Jesus is the specific topic of God’s plan of salvation. McGarvey commented, “From this we learn that in preaching to him Jesus, Philip had instructed him concerning baptism; that when men preach Jesus as they should, baptism is a part of the sermon” (158). It would have been easy for Philip to

preach around the necessity for his prospect to make some fundamental changes in his life. Changes, that when insisted upon, most certainly would have made evident to his prospect that he was lost. From this we learn, sixth, that in order to be an effective teacher of God’s Word *one must be willing to preach the plan of salvation which includes baptism.* There has been a tendency over the years to leave the Lord’s plan of salvation out of our teaching. Often times, sermons are ended with a generic statement that begins with “If you have a need.” Which leaves one with the obvious question, a need for what? If there is a need, and the need is salvation, does it not make sense to explain how to fulfill that need? There are going to be many times in each of our lives when we are given only one opportunity to offer the Lord’s invitation to someone outside of the body of Christ. We should seize these opportunities and teach them what they must do to be saved (Acts 2:37-38).

### **The Pattern of the Converted**

Having surveyed the account given to us in Acts 8:26-40, focused solely on the pattern demonstrated by Philip the converter let us now consider the pattern left for us by the one converted.

As Philip traveled along the deserted road from Jerusalem to Gaza Luke recorded that he beheld, “a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure” (v. 27b). Ethiopia “was one of the great kingdoms of Africa” (Reese 332), and was to the south of Egypt (Ezek. 29:10). In the Old Testament Ethiopia is often referred to as Cush (Gen. 2:12), but differs from the present day Ethiopia. Bock commented:

The region known as Ethiopia in ancient times is probably not the same as today, but was located south of Egypt in ancient Cush, in the central part of modern Sudan, at a location known as Meroe (also known as Nubia; Yamauchi 2006). It was one thousand miles north to the Mediterranean. (339)

Luke also indicated that this man was a eunuch, causing most scholars to believe that he was a castrated male for this “was the common meaning of the word” (Roper 302). Some, such as Henry, believe that he was “*a eunuch*, not in body, but in office—lord chamberlain or steward of the household” (84). This belief is held because, as Roper acknowledged:

[I]t was such a common practice among the heathen to make eunuchs of men holding positions where they could be tempted, such as being in charge of the harem or the treasury, the word ‘eunuch’ (*eunouchos*) was sometimes used in the sense of ‘an official,’ whether the man had been emasculated or not. (302)

However, it seems best to conclude that this man was a castrated male because Luke further describes the official work of this man, making the term eunuch redundant if it is to mean nothing more than an official (Gaertner 150). The eunuch from Ethiopia was in charge of the treasury of Candace the queen. Candace was not a familial name but a title such as Caesar or Pharaoh. Bruce offered this interesting insight on the function of the queen within the Ethiopian dynasty, “The king of Ethiopia was venerated as the child of the sun and regarded as too sacred a personage to discharge the secular functions of royalty; these were performed on his behalf by the queen-mother, who regularly wore the dynastic title Candace” (186). It becomes clear that the Ethiopian eunuch was indeed a man of great authority since he was the treasurer of all the wealth of Ethiopia. As Marshall emphatically stated, “The high position of the official as the royal treasurer is emphasized: this was no insignificant convert!” (162).

The description of the Ethiopian convert is enhanced even further by his actions that are recorded before meeting Philip on the deserted road. Luke wrote, the treasurer “had come to Jerusalem for to worship” (v. 27c) and “was returning” (28a). The eunuch had traveled to Jerusalem, a trek of several hundreds of miles, and was now making his way back to his homeland. This fact of course causes one to ask, “Why was a eunuch from Ethiopia going

to Jerusalem to worship?” There are differing opinions among scholars, but most believe that this man was a Jew, a proselyte, or a God-fearing Gentile. It is all together unlikely that the eunuch was a God-fearer because Luke later emphasized that Cornelius was the first God fearing Gentile to be converted (Acts 10; 11; 15:7, 14). Whether the eunuch from Ethiopia was a Jew or a proselyte is a question that is not easily answered. There is evidence to suggest that a Jewish colony was present in Ethiopia because Manasseh who formed an alliance with Psammethichus, king of Egypt, had “sent off to protect the outposts of his kingdoms. Thus Jews had been in Ethiopia for some centuries” (Reese 333). Likewise, as evidenced by Joseph and Daniel it was “not uncommon for Jews born and reared in foreign lands to attain to eminent positions” (McGarvey 152). Others believe that the eunuch was most likely a proselyte because he resided in Ethiopia and because the account recorded would have provided “another bridge between preaching to the Jews and the Gentiles” (Roper 301). If the eunuch was a proselyte, Luke would have provided a detailed description of the conversion of a proselyte (the Ethiopian) in Acts Chapter 8, a Jew (Saul) in Acts Chapter 9, and a Gentile “God-fearer” (Cornelius) in Acts Chapter 10. Some contend, such as Marshall, that if the treasurer was a physical eunuch, he could not have been a proselyte (161). This conclusion is based on Deuteronomy 23:1, which barred a physical eunuch from entering into the congregation of the Lord. However, the same would have forbidden a Jew who had become a physical eunuch from entering the congregation. It is likely, whether the eunuch was a Jew or a proselyte, that he would have been restricted to worshipping in the court of the Gentiles. However, Isaiah 56:3ff. foreshadows of a day in which eunuchs would be accepted into house of the Lord. When that day would come is not clear. Whatever the case, there is a lack of sufficient evidence to be dogmatic on this issue. The overriding importance of Luke’s description is that the eunuch from Ethiopia had a desire, if not an obsession, to worship his Creator. For one to travel, as the eunuch did, hundreds of miles round trip for the *purpose* (Lenski 338; Kistemaker 313) of worshipping God demonstrates exemplary desire and commitment. The eunuch

taught by example, first, to be a prospect for the kingdom of heaven *one must have a desire to worship God*. A desire to worship God must be present before one knows Christ, such as the case here, or it must be created after studying the Word of Truth. If there is no desire to acknowledge that one is a created being, and there is no commitment to give reverence to that Creator, there is, likewise, no hope for that individual. The same desire and commitment must remain, even after one is converted, in order to inherit everlasting life (Heb. 10:25-26). Apathy can, and in many cases has, infiltrated the hearts of members of the Lord's church to the extent that some have deemed worship unimportant, and therefore unnecessary. If the eunuch was willing to travel such a great distance to satisfy his intense desire to worship God, how much more should members of the Lord's church, who have access to all of the blessings in Christ (Eph. 1:3), desire to assemble to worship God?

As the eunuch traveled home, having worshipped God, Luke recorded that the eunuch "read Esaias the prophet" (v. 28b), evidently, aloud, because as Philip approached he "heard him read" (v. 30b). The common practice of the day to read the Scripture aloud was not only customary but commanded (Deut. 6:7). Perhaps, this practice should be followed today, for it is "a good way to keep the mind fixed on what we read" (McGarvey 153). There is a considerable amount of dedication for the truth demonstrated by the treasurer who, having already worshipped and was most likely exhausted from travel, was *continually* reading as he traveled home. The eunuch established, second, to be a prospect for the kingdom of heaven *one must have a desire to read the Scripture*. How refreshing it is to read of a high ranking official dedicated to reading the word of God, as Roper wrote, "if more public servants followed his example, the world would be a better place in which to live" (303). Instead, more often than not, government officials spend most of their time apologizing for their faith, giving a profoundly different meaning to *Christian Apologetics*. There is no other way to produce faith in God than to read for one's self or to hear from the lips of another the word of God (Rom. 10:17). Reading the Scripture is not something that is

only to be done before one is converted to Christ; rather, a Christian is to continue to grow in the Scripture (Heb. 5:12-14), something that can only be accomplished through reading and studying (1 Tim. 4:13; 2 Tim. 2:15). It can become common practice for Christians, if they are not careful, to read from the Holy writ but once on Sunday allowing their Bibles to collect dust for the remainder of the week.

Philip, having heard the eunuch reading from Isaiah, asked the eunuch if he understood that which he was reading. In response the eunuch said, “How can I, except some man should guide me?” (v. 31a), and Luke recorded, that “he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him” (v. 31b). A question that could have been taken as an insult was answered with a humble admittance. The word translated “guide” (*hodēgeō*) means, “to assist someone in acquiring information or knowledge, *lead, guide, conduct*” (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich 690). The eunuch from Ethiopia needed assistance and invited (*parakaleō*, translated “desired” in KJV) Philip into his chariot to lead him unto the truth. The portion of Scripture that the treasurer found difficult was Isaiah 53:7-8, from the Septuagint, where it is written, “He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? For his life is taken from the earth” (32b-33). With perplexity, the eunuch asked Philip, “[O]f whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?” (v. 34b). The interpretation of Isaiah 53 has been a matter of contention among Jews for centuries, for they struggle with the concept of a Messiah who would suffer as a Servant on Earth and reign as King over a heavenly kingdom. For this reason, they “wrest” the Scriptures (2 Peter 3:16) and refuse to acknowledge that Isaiah 53 is a prophecy concerning Jesus, who in no uncertain words applied the same portion of Scripture to Himself (Luke 22:37). Space will not allow a detailed application of Isaiah 53:7-8 (for a detailed approach see Jackson 97-98), but Isaiah makes reference to the willful, sacrificial death of Jesus Christ who was wrongfully put to death by men but vindicated by the Father, who having raised Him from

the dead, gave Him a name above every name (Philip. 2:9), a name that is still revered by His spiritual progeny, namely, Christians. Though the Scripture was produced to induce understanding there are portions which are “hard to be understood” (2 Peter 3:16). Without instruction from well-studied Christians one can become overwhelmed by the complexity of the subject matter and draw misguided conclusions. This is not to imply, as the Roman Catholic hierarchy does (Reese 335), that the Scripture cannot be understood unless one has an “infallible” interpreter (no such man exists), for the Scripture was made for all (Acts 17:11; 1 Peter 2:2; 2 Peter 1:19; Rev. 1:3). In this case, the eunuch recognized he needed guidance and desired to be instructed so that he would understand the Scripture correctly. The treasurer demonstrated by example, third, to be a prospect for the kingdom of heaven *one must desire to correctly understand the Scripture*. There are numerous individuals that blind themselves from the truth, refusing any guidance, thinking it better to abide in the comfort of their ignorance than to abide “in the doctrine of Christ” (2 John 1:9). For these, eternal destruction will be their reward (2 Thess. 1:9).

Philip answered the eunuch’s question, perhaps beyond what the eunuch had originally intended, and preached unto him Jesus. Upon seeing water, the eunuch asked Philip “[W]hat doth hinder me to be baptized?” (v. 36c) and he “commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him” (v. 38). Having heard the truth, the eunuch was eager to obey the truth. The treasurer’s response is a stark contrast to Felix’s response, who desired to wait for a more convenient season (Acts 24:25) to obey the Gospel, a season that probably never came. The great desire that the eunuch showed to obey the Gospel is inspirational; the word of truth had convicted him and he was unwilling to wait to obey it. Surely there would have been water in his homeland that was suitable for immersion, but waiting was not an option. Rather upon first sight of water he commanded that his chariot be halted, and Philip baptized him. As Coffman correctly stated, “There are many today who need to command their own chariot to stand still while they submit to the ordinance of God” (174). From the eunuch’s example it is

apparent, fourth, to be a prospect for the kingdom of heaven, *one must desire to obey the Scripture*. The propensity for mankind to follow the pattern demonstrated by the treasurer but then diverge from that pattern when they must submit to the Will of God is alarming. Obedience to the word of God is how you become a Christian and how you remain a faithful Christian. There is no other way (Matt. 7:21).

### **The Pattern of the Conversion**

The method which the eunuch followed to become a Christian is the same method found throughout the New Testament. This common salvation (Jude 3) is a pattern that must be followed if one desires to become a member of the Lord's church.

In the account of the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch, Luke recorded that the eunuch "read Esaias the prophet" (v. 28b). The importance of building one's faith in God according to the Gospel is emphasized throughout the Scripture. Paul wrote, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). It is not by coincidence that God did not send His angel to provide instruction directly to the eunuch on what he must do to be saved, for it is evident that God bestowed this duty to men (Rom. 10:14-15; Acts 22:10, 16; 10: 3-6, 9-20, 48) and not to angels. God most certainly could have exercised His will and forced the eunuch to become a Christian, but God did no such thing. Instead, He allowed the eunuch to build his faith by reading the Scripture himself and by hearing a lesson from Philip which originated and resided in the Scripture. The first step toward becoming a Christian is *hearing the word of God*.

After hearing a lesson from the mouth of Philip concerning Jesus, and asking what hindered him from being baptized, it is recorded that Philip said, "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest" (v. 37b). Most scholars agree that the entirety of this verse lacks early manuscript support, though as Metzger wrote, "[T]he tradition of the Ethiopian's confession of faith in Christ was current as early as the latter part of the second century, for Irenaeus quotes part of it (*Against Heresies*, III. xii. 8)" (360). Whether or not these are the exact words of Philip can be debated. What

cannot be debated is that belief in Christ was required for one to become a Christian from the inception of the church (Mark 16:16; Acts 4:4, 32; 5:14; 8:12). Therefore, the second step toward becoming a Christian is *belief in Christ*.

Repentance, though not mentioned in this account, is a necessary step towards one's salvation. On the day of Pentecost, when asked, "what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37c) Peter instructed them to "Repent, and be baptized" (2:38a). Jackson wrote, "Normally, repentance, in its fullest sense, conveys the idea of a change of mind accompanied by a reformation of character" (27). There is a fundamental difference between a worldly sorrow, in which there is "no requirement to abandon the practice of sin" (27), and godly sorrow which moves one to repentance (2 Cor. 7:10), and combines change of mind with reformation of character. The third step to becoming a Christian is *repentance of past sins*.

The eunuch responded to Philip's requirement of belief with these words, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (v. 37b). As mentioned above, this verse lacks early manuscript support. Yet there is little question that "the formula *pisteuo . . . christon* was doubtless used by the early church in baptismal ceremonies" (Metzger 315). Bruce added, "This addition certainly reflects primitive Christian practice. When a convert was formally admitted to Christian fellowship by baptism, he made a public confession of his new faith, probably in response to a definite question" (190). The New Testament makes apparent that confession is an important doctrine (Matt. 10:32, 33; 16:16; John 9:22; 12:42; 1 Tim. 6:12-3; Heb. 3:1; 10:23; 1 John 4:2, 15) and a necessary step towards one's salvation (Rom. 10:9-10). Those who are ashamed to confess Christ before men, the same will be denied by Christ before the Father (Matt. 10:32-33). The fourth step to becoming a Christian is *confessing Christ*.

Finally, Luke recorded that after seeing water and confirming he was a candidate for baptism the eunuch "commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him" (v. 38). The word *baptized* comes from the Greek word *baptizo*, which means "to immerse, go under, or sink" (Jackson 100). From the beginning, the importance



of baptism was expressed by Christ (Mark 16:16) and the apostles (Acts 2:38). If Christ and the apostles are described as the foundation of the church, and they are (1 Cor. 3:11; Eph. 2:20), and they taught that baptism was necessary for salvation, and they did (Mark 16:16; Rom. 6:3, 4; etc.), why would one conclude that baptism is unnecessary today? This is a conclusion not easily explained but will certainly lead to many lost souls (Mark 16:16). Still, some insist that baptism is necessary but that it does not necessarily have to be immersion. Marshall commented, “[I]f the New Testament leaves the precise mode of baptism obscure, perhaps we ought not insist on one particular type of practice” (165). This is a profound argument because *baptize* is a transliteration of the Greek word *baptizo* and not a definition. The definition, as mentioned above, means “to immerse.” If the definition of *baptizo* is not convincing enough, there is a clear indication of how baptism was administered in the New Testament, all of which imply immersion. Jesus “went straightway out of the water” (Matt. 3:16) after being baptized, John baptized in Aenon “because there was much water there” (John 3:23), and Paul describes a burial on two different occasions in reference to baptism (Col. 1:12; Rom. 6:3-4). Likewise, immersion is implied in our text for “they went down both into the water” (v. 38b) and they both subsequently, came “up out of the water” (v. 39a). Barnes refused to accept this translation and wrote, “It may be remarked here that the preposition *eis*, translated ‘into,’ does not necessarily mean that they went *into* the water. Its meaning would be as well expressed by ‘to’ or ‘unto,’ or should say, ‘they went *to* the water,’ without meaning to determine whether they went *into* it or not” (150). Barnes used verses such as John 11:38, Luke 11:49, and John 21:4 to prove that *eis* is sometimes better translated “to” (150). This same tactic is used by Barnes to demonstrate, in his mind, that *ek* can mean “from” rather than “out of” in our text (151). Yet, there is little substance to this argument, because it still does not adequately address the definition of *baptizo*. If God would have given mankind words scrambled on a page one might have to wonder whether *eis* is better translated as “into” or “to;” but God in His infinite wisdom gave mankind words in sentences. Words, that

when read in their context, can be understood. For this reason, when one understands that the word baptize in our Bibles is a transliteration of the Greek word *baptizo* which means to immerse it necessarily gives to us the correct meaning of *eis* and *ek* (cf. Hackett 130). How else would Philip have been able to immerse the Ethiopian eunuch without going “into” the water and subsequently “come out of the water?” It would have taken a miracle, a miracle that is in no way indicated by our text. You see, *baptizo* still means to immerse even when it is preceded by *eis* and followed by *ek*, and therefore eliminates sprinkling or pouring as acceptable modes of baptism. The fifth and final step toward becoming a Christian is *baptism for the remission of sins*.

### Conclusion

Luke, inspired by the Holy Spirit, recorded an account of the conversion of a man from Ethiopia that remains relevant today. It continues to serve as a pattern for Christians and non-Christians alike.

For the Christian it serves as the answer to the commonly asked question, “How can I become an effective teacher?” Philip, who plays the role of the converter in this account, provides a pattern toward becoming an effective teacher. If the pattern demonstrated by Philip is followed by Christians they most certainly will become effective teachers of God’s word. The pattern toward becoming an effective teacher as seen in Philip, recorded by Luke, and emphasized by this writer is as follows: To be an effective teacher of God’s word one must: (1) *be a worthy representative of the Gospel of Christ (Philip. 1:27)*; (2) *be willing to obey His Word without hesitation or rebuttal*; (3) *be bold with the Gospel of Christ*; (4) *be able to gauge the prospect’s level of understanding and then teach at that level*; (5) *be able to determine what is important to the prospect, and use it as a foundation to preach Jesus*; and (6) *be willing to teach the plan of salvation which includes baptism*.

For the non-Christian the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch serves as an answer to the commonly asked question, “What actions demonstrate that I am a prospect for the kingdom of

heaven?” The eunuch answers this question by leaving a pattern, which if followed today, would prepare a non-Christian for their conversion to Christ. To be a prospect for the kingdom of heaven one must: (1) *have a desire to the worship God*; (2) *have a desire to read the Scripture*; (3) *have a desire to correctly understand the Scripture*; and (4) *have a desire to obey the Scripture*.

For Christians and non-Christians, the conversion of the man from Ethiopia serves as an answer to the commonly asked question, “What must one do to become a Christian?” The method of conversion, followed by Philip and the eunuch and taught elsewhere in the Bible, is a pattern, which if followed, will be acceptable to the Lord. To become a Christian one must: (1) *hear the Word of God*, (2) *believe in Christ*, (3) *repent of past sins*, (4) *confess Christ*, and (5) *be baptized for the remission of sins*.

### **Behold the Pattern**

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### **Biographical Sketch**

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# *The Marvelous Miracle*

2:2-21

Gary Workman

The marvelous miracle of Acts chapter 2 is a “must-read” for any child of God. It sets the stage for explaining the miraculous activity that occurred in the first-century church, and a correct understanding of it is essential for one to be safe-guarded from erroneous claims of Christian miracles today. (Note: unless otherwise indicated, all Bible quotations will be from the NKJV.)

## **The Biblical Narrative**

***The occurrence of the miracle (1-4).*** The biblical text tells us that while the apostles were all together in one place on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1) something suddenly happened (v. 2). There was a *sound (echos)* like a “rushing mighty wind” that filled the place (no doubt in the temple area) where they were sitting. As far as the record goes, there was no actual movement of air at all—just something that sounded like a violent wind. The sound came from heaven and obviously represented the descent of the Holy Spirit as the continuing story indicates. Jews who were very familiar with their Scriptures might think of “the blast of the breath” of God (2 Sam. 22:16) as “the Spirit is poured upon us from on high” (Isa. 32:15). The Greek term for *wind* in this verse is the same word used in the Septuagint in Genesis 2:7 for God’s breathing into man’s nostrils the breath of life. But on Pentecost it was Jesus inbreathing to the apostles the Holy Spirit of God.

There was not only an audible occurrence that day but also a visual one—tongues that looked like fire and that parted among the apostles. These were not cloven or forked tongues, as the KJV indicates, but rather a “distributing” of the fiery phenomenon so that each apostle got a part of it as it sat upon each one of them (v. 3). Though the biblical text does not say it, these fiery tongues would seem to be a visible indication to the onlookers of the ability

that the apostles were now receiving from heaven “to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (v. 4).

***The response of the multitude (5-13).*** Luke tells us that in Jerusalem at this time there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven (v. 5). To say they were living in Jerusalem can simply mean visiting there as pilgrims to the feast from all over the Roman Empire and beyond. This great throng of people must have been in the temple area near the apostles, and they “came together” when “this sound occurred” (v. 6).

The word for *sound* here is the Greek word ***phone***, meaning sound or voice, not the word Luke used in verse two. This obviously means the crowd heard some sound, but which one? Was it the wind-like sound or the voices of the apostles, or was it both? From the continuing narrative we know the crowd heard the tongue-speaking. But Luke apparently means in verse 6 that it was the wind-like blast that caught their attention in the first place, because he goes on to say that when the crowd assembled they heard the spoken languages. The apostles were not filled with ecstatic speech or gibberish, but rather they were speaking at the Spirit’s prompting other languages that they had never learned.

Luke says the crowd was confounded (KJV, ASV) or confused (NKJV) or bewildered (ESV) by what they heard (v. 6). Not only that but they were “amazed and marveled” because of the fact that the speakers were Galileans (v. 7). As to how the hearers recognized that the speakers were Galileans, some have suggested distinctive dress or, more likely, a distinctive accent (cf. Matt. 26:73). Galilee was a region that was not known for academic or intellectual achievement (cf. John 7:52; Acts 4:13). The crowd was wondering how simple, uneducated men from Galilee had all this linguistic expertise. The hearers went on to specify the various peoples or places from which they had come. Starting from the east and continuing generally toward the west, fifteen nationalities or lands are listed, representing at least ten different languages (vv. 9-11). Luke says again that the hearers were amazed, and not only that but even “perplexed” (v. 12). They were simply “at a loss” (Bock 101) to explain it, and the bare fact of their questions about it was a tacit acknowledgement that a miracle had occurred.

The question of the crowd in verse 8 is this: “And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born?” Some have suggested that the wording here indicates a miracle on the ears of the hearers. They suppose that the apostles were speaking in some possibly unknown or heavenly language and that each person heard in his own native dialect. From verse 8 alone, this position can be neither confirmed nor refuted, but other verses in the context clear up any uncertainty.

The careful reader will remember that before the question of verse 8 was asked Luke made a statement in verse 6 about what was taking place. There he does not say that “every man heard in his own language” but rather that “every man heard THEM SPEAKING in his own language.” It was not as if the apostles were speaking in various languages, they were actually doing it – “they began to speak with other tongues” as verse 4 has already told us. And in verse 11 the hearers said, “We hear THEM SPEAKING in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.” By comparing verses 4 and 11, we learn that the other tongues the apostles were speaking were the native tongues of the audience. This makes it clear that there was no miracle performed on the ears of the listeners but rather on the tongues of the speakers. These people were not amazed by their own ability to understand; they were astonished at the Galilean speakers’ abilities to communicate in all those diverse languages. And this led them to ask another question (v. 12): “Whatever could this mean?”

There was a different reaction to the apostolic tongue-speaking on the part of others. The Greek word here is *heteros*—“others of a different kind.” This may mean that, rather than being pilgrims to Jerusalem, these were permanent residents, possibly the very scribes and Pharisees that had clamored for the crucifixion of Jesus. In any case, their jeers did not exhibit the characteristics of devout men, for they mockingly said, “They are filled with new wine” (v. 13). This traditional wording of “new wine” (KJV, ASV, NKJV, etc.) is actually from the Greek word *gleukos*, sweet wine that was only partially fermented (BDAG 201). But by saying that the apostles were filled with it, the mockers were ridiculing the tongues as drunken gibberish.

These skeptical comments indicate that people in the crowd could not only hear the apostles speaking in their own languages but could also hear them speaking in other languages the hearers did not understand. This reinforces the point already made that there was no miracle on the part of the hearers. How the Holy Spirit arranged this so that it would not become chaotic is unknown, but we can be sure that He did (1 Cor. 14:33, 40). Perhaps each apostle spoke consecutively or at some distance from the others, or maybe they just all spoke the same thing in unison. In any case, the use of multiple languages must have been realized by all who were present, whether they admitted it or not. The mocking derision on the part of some would therefore be unconvincing to any sincere person, but the Holy Spirit did not let the charge go unanswered. He inspired Peter to draw a sharp line between being “drunken with wine” and being “filled with the Spirit”—a distinction that the apostle Paul penned to Christians many years later (Eph. 5:18).

*The reply of Peter (14-21).* “But Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said to them...” (Acts 2:14). The apostles had been sitting when the Holy Spirit came upon them (vv. 2-4), but now they rise to their feet. Though Peter was impulsive by nature, it seems to have been the Lord’s choice for Peter to be the spokesman for all on this occasion. Since Jesus had given to him “the keys of the kingdom” (Matt. 16:19), he was the keynote speaker—and what a masterful job he did! His first task was to respond to the charge of drunkenness, and it was swift and to the point. He made it clear to the skeptics that it was unreasonable for them to even suggest this. As Paul penned later on, “Those who get drunk are drunk at night” (1 Thess. 5:7), but on this day of Pentecost it was only nine o’clock in the morning! Peter had no need to linger on this point because even the mockers knew that it was a strict violation for Jews to drink intoxicants on feast days (Reese 57).

Peter quickly went on to tell the audience exactly what was taking place: “This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel.” He then quoted from Joel 2:28-32, adding some embellishments. This was a prophecy about a miraculous outpouring of the Holy Spirit

during a period called “the last days” (v. 17). There are other Old Testament prophecies pointing to the last days (Isa. 2:2; Micah 4:1), and some New Testament references as well (Heb. 1:1; 9:26; 1 Cor. 10:11). Whether Joel’s prophecy referred to the last days of the Jewish nation or to the entire Messianic dispensation has been a disputed question, but that need not concern us here. In any case, Peter’s *this is that* identification places the fulfillment of it in the early days of the Christian age.

The key phrase of the prophetic passage is God’s announcement: “I will pour out of my Spirit...” (v. 17). God’s pouring “out” (KJV, NKJV, ESV) or “forth” (ASV) the Holy Spirit indicates a bestowal directly from heaven without human intervention such as through the laying on of apostolic hands (Acts 8:18). The phrase in itself does not indicate what effects the outpouring would have. Further explanation is needed to make that known. There is a non-miraculous outpouring of the Holy Spirit on every child of God (Titus 3:5-6; Workman 404-8), but that was not the subject of Joel’s prophecy. The Pentecostal outpouring was entirely miraculous, as the prophecy itself made clear. Joel quoted God as saying that the recipients of this outpouring would prophesy, see visions, and dream dreams—obviously in a supernatural way (Joel 2:28).

In Peter’s quotation of Joel’s prophecy, he justifiably added the words “says God” (Acts 2:17), since that was made clear in the context of the original prophecy. Peter also added the words “and they shall prophesy” as an inspired commentary at the end of verse 18, a repetition of part of the quotation in verse 17. The subjects of this prophecy were male and female, young and old, bond and free—which immediately tells us that the fulfillment of the prophecy was not exhausted on the day of Pentecost.

### **Baptism in the Holy Spirit**

Bible students have universally understood the miracle of Acts 2 to be what the New Testament elsewhere mentions as being “baptized in [or with] the Holy Spirit.” As we have seen, Joel prophesied it—but not under this terminology. In the New Testament record, John the baptizer foretold it, Jesus promised it,

and Peter explained and identified it. It is not mentioned in any of the letters of the New Testament. In order to rightly understand the marvelous miracle of Acts 2 there are three important questions about baptism in the Holy Spirit that should be asked and answered as we consider the biblical material on it: (1) Who received it? (2) What was the purpose of it? (3) Do we have it today?

**John the baptizer foretold it.** The prediction by John was recorded in three gospel accounts – Matthew 3:11, Mark 1:8, and Luke 3:16. Matthew’s account reads: “I indeed baptized you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (NKJV). John did not explain the purpose of baptism in the Holy Spirit, nor did he specifically say who would receive it. So we must ask—is there anything in the wording or any principle in these passages that includes us today? Some think that when John said, “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 3:11), the word *you* must include all Christians of all time. But there is nothing in the context to warrant this conclusion. One cannot interpret the word *you* to refer to anyone besides those present and, in fact, it did not include all of them. John did not even baptize in water all of those who heard his words. And likewise, not all of those who were present to hear John preach would receive the promised baptism in the Holy Spirit.

We should notice that the word *you* in verses 7-9 did not include all of John’s audience but only those he addressed as a “brood of vipers.” Neither did the word *you* in the phrase “I baptize you in water” (v. 11) include all of his audience but only those who received his baptism. It is therefore unwarranted to conclude anything more from John’s prediction than that some of those that he baptized would later be baptized by Jesus in the Holy Spirit. And some others (those who rejected Jesus) would be baptized in fire. John mentions no principle of salvation involved in the baptism in the Holy Spirit. It was neither a command nor a promised result of salvation. It was simply a prophecy or prediction about something Jesus would do.

**Jesus promised it.** Two passages penned by Luke show us that our Lord promised baptism in the Holy Spirit to the apostles, who would serve as witnesses of His death and resurrection. Luke's record in his gospel account does not specifically mention the expression "baptized with the Holy Spirit," but there can be no doubt that Jesus was referring to this Holy Spirit baptism as "the promise of my Father" (Luke 24:48-49). He told the apostles to wait in Jerusalem for the fulfillment of it, and He said it would be accompanied by their being "endued with power from on high." Luke's account in Acts also refers to "the promise of the Father" (Acts 1:4), and this time the promise was identified as to be "baptized with the Holy Spirit" (v. 5). As in the other account, Jesus commanded them to wait in Jerusalem for it (v. 4) and He said it would take place "not many days from now" (v. 5). This indicates a definite event that was soon to arrive. Again the apostles were called witnesses and this time the power they would receive was specifically foretold to be from the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (v. 8).

**On the day of Pentecost the apostles received it.** Peter said that Jesus "received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit" and that "He poured out this which you now see and hear" (Acts 2:33). Some want to greatly expand the number of those empowered by going back to chapter one (cf. Bruce 61). But only the apostles received Holy Spirit baptism on the day of Pentecost, not the 120 of Acts 1:15. Notice that the apostles—Matthias and the other eleven—were specifically mentioned in Acts 1:26. When the next verse says that *they* were all together in one place (Acts 2:1), the reference is obviously to these apostles (the immediate antecedent), not to the 120 mentioned twelve verses earlier. Those who attempt to identify the antecedent of *they* in Acts 2:1 as the 120 of Acts 1:15 find nothing in the context here to support that view. They simply move 16 verses down to Joel's prophecy, which Peter began quoting in verse 17, and "dredge up" what they consider "universal language" to interpret the meaning of *they* at the beginning of the chapter (Reese 45-46). But this procedure assumes that all of Joel's prophecy was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost, an assumption that cannot be defended.

The *they* of Acts 2:1 who "were all filled with the Holy Spirit" are the same ones who spoke with other tongues in verse 4, and the hearers identified all of those as Galileans (Acts 2:7). The only one of the original apostles who was not a Galilean was Judas, and this is why an angel could address the remaining eleven at the ascension of Jesus as "men of Galilee" (Acts 1:11). The speakers on the day of Pentecost could not have been the 120—which included the women (Acts 1:14)—because some of them (Lazarus, for example, and his sisters Mary and Martha) were from Judea.

Those who spoke in tongues on the day of Pentecost were then accused of being drunk (Acts 2:13). When Peter denied the charge, he stood up with the eleven (v. 14), not with the 120 of chapter one. He then told the audience that *these* are not drunk (v. 15), meaning himself and the other eleven apostles with whom he was standing. Peter also identified himself and the others who spoke in tongues as witnesses (Acts 2:32). At the very moment he said this, he was standing with the other apostles (v. 14). Let us remember that Jesus had told the apostles they would receive power through the baptism of the Holy Spirit and be His witnesses (Luke 24:48; Acts 1:8). Matthias was then chosen to replace Judas as an apostle because he too was qualified to be a witness (Acts 1:22). Years later, Peter explained that these witnesses did not include all of the early Christians but only certain chosen ones (Acts 10:40-42)—namely, the apostles.

To further substantiate the fact that it was only the apostles who received baptism in the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, notice that at the end of Peter's sermon in Acts 2 it was "Peter and the rest of the apostles" the audience questioned (v. 37), not the 120. Also, the converts continued steadfastly in "the apostles' teaching" (v. 42), not the teaching of the 120. Not only that but Luke is careful to tell us that "many wonders and signs were done through the apostles" (v. 43), not through the 120 of chapter one. All of this shows conclusively that it was only the apostles who received the baptism in the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

**Peter explained it.** The opening verses of Acts 1 tell us that Jesus remained on Earth for forty days after His resurrection. If that number was meant to be exact, it was apparently on the fortieth

day that Jesus told the apostles they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit “not many days from now” (v. 5). Since Pentecost came on the fiftieth day, the promise was fulfilled just ten days after Jesus gave it. Because of this, there has not been any doubt at all that the great miracle of Pentecost was the fulfillment of the promised Holy Spirit baptism.

Peter’s explanation of the Pentecostal outpouring was that it was also the fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy (Joel 2:28-32). Peter said this (the outpouring) “is what was spoken [foretold] by the prophet Joel” (Acts 2:16). The promise of Jesus was just to the apostles, but the prophecy of Joel included more than the apostles. In that prophecy God promised to give the outpouring of the Spirit not just to Jews but to “all flesh” (v. 17). Moreover the outpouring would come to sons, daughters, old men, young men and various male and female servants (vv. 17-18). Since much of this did not take place on that day, we must look beyond Pentecost for further fulfillment of it. But let us be careful—the term *all flesh* in Joel’s prophecy is not to be understood in an absolute way as if it refers to “the whole human race” (Bruce 61). Animals have flesh (1 Cor. 15:39), but the prophecy did not include them. The ungodly also have flesh (Gal. 6:8), but it did not include them either (1 Cor. 2:14). Likewise, there is no compelling reason to believe that the prophecy included all Christians.

The term *all flesh* must indicate all categories of humanity. This surely means that both Jews and Gentiles would be included, since these were God’s own divisions of humanity (Eph. 2:11-19). Joel’s prophecy also stipulated both males and females, and slaves as well as free people (Acts 2:17-18), the same broad categories that Paul later said were leveled by the gospel (Gal. 3:28). Peter’s quotation from Joel therefore gives us reason to look for a further occurrence of baptism in the Holy Spirit. But whatever categories of humanity were embraced by the term *all flesh*, those who received baptism in the Holy Spirit had to be able to do the signs Joel mentioned—prophecies, visions, and dreams—and therefore it cannot include infants.

***Peter identified it again.*** When Peter went to the home of Cornelius in Caesarea and preached the gospel there, “the Holy

Spirit fell on all those who heard the word” (Acts 10:44), and they spoke in tongues (v. 46). Let us remember that this was a special occasion arranged by supernatural activity on both ends. Cornelius was visited by an angel who told him to send for Peter (vv. 1-6). When the messengers sent by Cornelius were arriving in Joppa to ask for Peter, he was receiving a vision on the housetop about the acceptability of Gentile converts, and the Spirit told him to go with them (vv. 9-23, 28). So it is not surprising to read that the Holy Spirit fell on the Gentiles in a supernatural way.

Peter explained this event later to the apostles and others in Jerusalem (Acts 11:1-18), saying, “The Holy Spirit fell on them as on us” (v. 15). He then identified the incident as a further fulfillment of the promise of Jesus regarding baptism in the Holy Spirit (v. 16), referring to the outpouring as “the like gift” (v. 17 KJV, ASV). In years past some tried to argue that the like gift was not the *same* gift, but in these older versions the Greek word translated *like* (*isos*) means “equal”—“the equal gift” (Marshall 515). Lexical authorities are in complete agreement that Luke said it was “the same gift” (BDAG 480; EDNT 201). It has been described as the “very same gift” (TDNT 3: 349), the “one and the same experience of the Spirit” (NIDNTT 2: 499) and was therefore widely translated as “the same gift” in various modern translations of the New Testament (NKJV, ESV, NASV, NIV, NRSV, et al.).

There are only two recorded instances of baptism in the Holy Spirit. The first was for the apostles on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). The second was for the first Gentile converts (Acts 10-11). One took place when Jews first heard the gospel, and the other took place when Gentiles first heard the gospel. The second occurrence was about eleven years after the first and after thousands of people had become Christians. If all the converts during those intervening years had been receiving the baptism in the Holy Spirit, Peter surely would have said that the Holy Spirit fell on the household of Cornelius as on all other Christians since the beginning of the church. Instead, he said that the Holy Spirit fell on them “as on us at the beginning” (Acts 11:15). In Peter’s report, it was only *us* and *them* who received the baptism in the Holy Spirit.



Over the next fifty-plus years of divinely recorded history of the church, there is no further record of any baptism in the Holy Spirit. This shows that the baptism in the Holy Spirit was just for one unique group of Jewish converts and one unique group of Gentile converts. The apostle Paul wrote a fourth of the New Testament and never mentioned it. However, Paul himself must have also been baptized with the Holy Spirit since he was one “born out of due time” but “not at all inferior to the most eminent apostles” (1 Cor. 15:8; 2 Cor. 11:5). For those two groups there were two baptisms—baptism in water and baptism in the Holy Spirit. But about twenty years after the second occurrence of Holy Spirit baptism, Paul wrote that there was only “one baptism” (Eph. 4:5). This was water baptism (Acts 8:36-38; 10:47). Holy Spirit baptism had passed away.

***The purpose and results of Holy Spirit baptism.*** On the day of Pentecost the purpose of baptism in the Holy Spirit was at least threefold. The apostles were baptized with the Holy Spirit to reveal the complete will of God to them as inspired men (John 16:13-14). Another purpose of Holy Spirit baptism that day was to draw the attention of the crowd so that those inspired men could preach the full gospel message to the first Jewish listeners (Acts 2:6-12). This enabled “the keys of the kingdom” to be understood and used (Matt. 16:19) and the way of salvation explained to the hearers (Acts 2:38). Another purpose of baptism in the Spirit that day was to empower the apostles as miracle-workers in order to authenticate them as God’s spokesmen and to confirm the word that they preached (Mark 16:20; Heb 2:3-4). From Pentecost onward they all had “the signs of an apostle” (2 Cor. 12:12).

At the home of Cornelius the purpose of baptism in the Holy Spirit was to convince the onlookers that Gentiles were acceptable candidates for the gospel. There was strong Jewish prejudice against Gentiles becoming Christians unless they first became Jewish proselytes (Acts 15:1). The Jewish-Christians who came with Peter were astonished when those Gentiles received their outpouring (Acts 10:44-46). This convinced Peter that he could not “withstand God” by refusing to accept them (Acts 11:17). Peter in turn pointed out to his companions that the Gentiles received the

outpouring of the Holy Spirit “just as we” (Acts 10:47), and Peter’s Jerusalem audience was also convinced by this event (Acts 11:18). Peter mentioned it again later on, saying that God gave the Gentiles the Holy Spirit “just as he did to us, and made no distinction between us and them” (Acts 15:8-9).

Though both Christian apostles and non-Christian prospects received the baptism in the Holy Spirit, one must not think that the latter group was just as saved or empowered as the first. The Gentile members of the household of Cornelius were not Christians at all when they received the baptism in the Holy Spirit, and receiving that gift did not make them Christians. Baptism in the Holy Spirit was not for that purpose. The angel told Cornelius that Peter would tell him words by which he and his household could be saved (Acts 11:14). Holy Spirit baptism simply convinced Peter and the other Jewish-Christians that these Gentiles were proper recipients of the gospel. Peter said God cleansed their hearts by faith (Acts 15:9), and they obeyed the gospel by being baptized (Acts 10:48).

Neither are we to conclude that receiving baptism in the Holy Spirit provided those Gentiles all of the supernatural abilities given to the apostles. It simply enabled them to speak in tongues and nothing more. Being “baptized with the Holy Spirit” indicates the reception of divinely given power from the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8) that is unmediated by the laying-on of human hands, but it says nothing about what exactly the resulting power would be. That was up to God or, more specifically, the Holy Spirit, who was “distributing to each one individually as He wills” (1 Cor. 12:11). In the case of the apostles, they were enabled to do “many wonders and signs” (Acts 2:43) or, as Paul put it, “signs and wonders and mighty deeds” (2 Cor. 12:12). In the case of the Gentiles, they were enabled only to speak in tongues (Acts 10:46). To say that certain people were “baptized with the Holy Spirit” does not identify the level of empowerment but only the mode (the direct outpouring) by which they received whatever power God wanted them to have. Gentile prospects were in no way empowered equally with apostles.

## Conclusion

The marvelous miracle on the day of Pentecost accomplished its task well. It enabled Peter to open the way of salvation into the Lord's church, and the written record of it is still accomplishing that task today. Baptism in the Holy Spirit is not for people today. It was for two entirely different purposes at very special times as the Lord's church was being established in the first century, and the accompanying supernatural phenomena were convincing to the onlookers. Later it was the record of such events that convinced the hearers or readers (John 20:30-31). We still have that record—"the faith" that was given once for all time throughout the Christian age (Jude 3). Instead of looking for miracles, people today can receive "the implanted word" (James 1:21) and be sanctified by God's truth (John 17:17).

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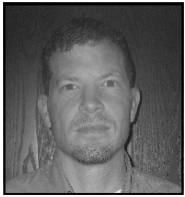
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# *The Gospel in Athens*

Acts 17:15-34

*Brad Poe*

I thank the eldership at the Hillview Terrace Church of Christ who oversees West Virginia School of Preaching for inviting me to contribute to this program. I thank Denver Cooper, director, for his work at the school, and his legacy of work in the kingdom. I thank Gene West for his supervision of these assigned manuscripts.



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## **Introduction**

Paul's sermon in Athens (Acts 17:16-34) has generated more discussion than any other sermon in Acts (cf. Bruce 353). Luke's internal outline, "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (1:8) lends the bones to support the meaty answer Paul makes to professional academics who ask him to explain his doctrine. The Holy Spirit who inspired Paul to say it and Luke to write it deemed Scripture incomplete without this sermon. We must have this talk about the gospel to ancient philosophers on Mars Hill.

*The Gospel.* The gospel, Paul wrote, is this "first of all": "how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the scriptures: and that He was seen..." (1 Cor. 15:3b-5a). Once the slapping of Saul's sandals was interrupted by light in the road somewhere between Jerusalem and Damascus, God had a man like no other (Acts 9:1-20). God did not do to Paul, there, what Paul

would have done to Paul. The New Testament calls it "grace." His experience drove him. Grace, packaged in the gospel, dispensed by sound local churches, applied by obedient response, was Paul's life-business. And it made him open his mouth while he waited in Athens.

*The Gospel for Jew and Greek.* Paul's preface to the gospel in Romans includes the order, "to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (1:16). This was not only theory but practice (Acts 13:46) with precedent (Matt. 10:5-6). One could argue that the Jew/Greek paradigm controls the narrative in Acts, the history in the primitive church and much content in the New Testament. Texts which describe the apostles' administration of this paradigm provide a model with assets modern Christians can underestimate (e.g. the diversity we should tolerate; the uniformity we must enforce; the flexibility of evangelistic method; handling conflict, et al.). At Pisidian Antioch, the Spirit provides a sample of Paul's synagogue sermons to Jews (Acts 13:16-41). At Athens, He provides a comparable sample of Paul's marketplace sermons to Greeks.

*The Gospel for Greeks in Athens.* Attraction to the text of "The Gospel in Athens" is due, not so much to *the gospel*, but to the broadcast *in Athens*. These are not merely non-Jews or Greeks, they are Athenian Greeks. Competent speakers consider their audience (Note: For how setting controls formal oratory, see Bitzer 1-14). Speech-composition is influenced, in part, by situation. The gospel is fixed, an audience is not, so interaction between them must be continually managed in order to keep the interface sticky or it will neither be understood nor adhered. If we are not making sense to people listening then it does not matter how right we are, how eloquent our speech or how loud we talk. Delayed in Athens, Paul encounters a thing which is other than it should be; being a Jew of Tarsus (Acts 22:3) and inspired by God, he perceives the constraints of his audience; the Areopagus invites a fitting response to the ignorance prevailing there. Thus, Paul speaks to philosophers in Athens.

**Text: Pre-Sermon (17:16-21)**

Paul's campaign at Thessalonica (Acts 17:1f) followed a pattern: (1) reasoning in the synagogue; (2) modest success with believers, extending to Greeks in the community; (3) then reaction from zealous Jews. Zealous Thessalonian Jews mobbed the church at "the house of Jason" (17:5), forced Paul out (17:10) then followed him to Berea (17:13). Converts escort Paul 250 miles away (a twelve-day trip) to Athens (17:14-15) where he would wait for Timothy and Silas to join him with a field report on the Macedonian mission (Acts 18:5; 1 Thess. 3:1-2).

*His spirit was stirred.* Rome outranked Athens in politics but Athens was still the cultural capital of the age. Bruce notes, "In consideration of her splendid past, the Romans left Athens free to carry on her own institutions as a free and allied city within the Roman Empire" (348-49). Idol worship was part of Greek culture, the Jews having been rid of idols since Assyria and Babylon. Paul was no stranger to false gods in missions (Acts 14:11f) but Athens stirred his spirit because of its degree of idolatry. Petronius said, "It is easier to find a god than a man there" (qtd. in Reese 621). Any art, shrine, architecture or sculpture which may have charmed some by aesthetic value only provoked Paul. Although it was this Gentile ignorance that prompted him, Paul obeyed his mission habit and preached to Jews at the synagogue on the Sabbath then interacted in the *Agora* (the central market which was the hub of civic and social life in the Greek city-states) during the rest of the week. His method exposed Jews, the devout (God-fearing Greeks) and pagan Greeks to the gospel. The *Agora* was filled with men trafficking in philosophies yet Paul quickly captured the curiosity of the public.

*What will this babblers say?* Disciples of two schools, Epicureans and Stoics, confronted Paul over his doctrine. Haenchen observed that Luke "is fond of contrasting two groups in the audience, one of which shows an interest while the other sharply denies the Christian proclamation" (517; cf. Acts 2:12f; 14:4; 23:6; 28:24). Epicurean (341-270 BC) founded a school whose doctrine held pleasure as the ideal. Stoics, rivals to Epicureans, were founded by Cypriote Zeno (340-265 BC), so named because Cypriote taught

on a porch (*stoa*). The Stoic worldview believed that "Fates" governed all things and taught that man must master his passions for pleasure. Like all other non-Christian worldviews, these were alternative attempts to understand life without God's full revelation.

Athens had its own "idea-economy" and Paul's preaching, either in style or content, resembled certain market stereotypes. Two interpretations of Paul emerged, the first characterized by the question, "What will this babblers say?" This was a term "characteristic of Athenian slang" (Bruce 351) which accused Paul of picking up bits and pieces of ideas here and there then quilting them into a whole, organic worldview. The second interpretation held that Paul proclaimed "strange gods . . . because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection." Both Reese (624) and Bruce (351) conjecture that the Athenians misunderstood Paul to be preaching two gods: Jesus and a female deity counterpart named "Anastasis," the Greek word for resurrection. As a result, they invited him to the Areopagus for an "account of his teaching" (Ramsay 247).

*And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus.* The Areopagus refers to an institutional body which functioned like a court and took its name from the location on a hill just south of the *Agora* at the foot of the Acropolis. Why did they bring Paul before this formal body? According to the text, the Stoics and Epicureans said, "May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is?" (Acts 17:19). Therefore the change of venue was likely brought on by a desire for quieter, more focused interrogation to discover Paul's "gospel" rather than suspicion or a legal maneuver to arraign Paul as a philosophical rival for possible trial over his teaching. Parenthetical notes like 17:21 are rare in Acts. Athenian appetite for new ideas was proverbial. The note clarifies the motive of this inquiry.

**Text: Sermon (17:22-31)**

Liberal scholarship judges Luke's record of Paul's speech at Athens as an inauthentic, late composition (cf. Haenchen 527-31). Such criticism is unwarranted and denies the verbal, plenary

inspiration of the Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The sermon text is genuine Paul and provides a sample of how the apostle approached crowds who lacked a background in the Hebrew Scriptures. Upon comparison with his sermon to the unsophisticated Gentiles at Lystra, the outline at Athens is not so revolutionary. At both Lystra and Athens Paul began with God as Creator (14:15; 17:24) Who gives life (14:15; 17:25-26), is witnessed by creation (14:17; 17:26-27), has been tolerant of ignorance (14:16; 17:30) but now requires universal repentance (14:15; 17:30).

*To the unknown god.* Paul stood to take the attitude of an orator. “Men of Athens” identifies the educated Greeks represented by the philosophers present. His opening should not be understood as a common rhetorical device to win the favor of the audience as the setting of the Areopagus was too venerable, and the participants too savvy, for such flattery. The “superstitious” Athenians are well-documented. If the reputation of Corinth was sexual immorality (1 Cor. 6:10-19), and Ephesus the occult (Acts 19:8-20), then Athens had a reputation for religiousness. Paul finds a point of connection in Athenian religion by an altar with an inscription “to the unknown god.” Paul introduces his sermon: “Him declare I unto you.”

*Lord of Heaven and Earth.* Classical Greek references in the sermon text have been discovered by commentators but Paul’s talk is “not classical but Biblical” (Bruce 357). Paul does not formally quote the Old Testament, but his sermon echoes 1 Kings 8:27, Isaiah 42:5, 66:1f and Psalm 50:9-12. The argument against idols in verse 29 is an Old Testament Hebrew argument (Deut. 4:28; Isa. 40:18; 44:9-20) and “judging the world in righteousness” is a biblical expression (Ps. 9:8; 96:13; 98:9). God’s assignment of space to the nations recalls Deuteronomy 32:8, Job 12:23, Psalm 115:16 and Daniel 2:21. The speech appears diplomatic but throughout the text, whether intentional or incidental, Paul’s assumptions and claims are both anti-Stoic and anti-Epicurean. The world is not left to Fates (the Stoic view) or indifferent gods (an Epicurean thought) but the Lord is in control of human affairs (v. 24). “That they should seek the Lord” (v. 27) is the goal of man, not pleasure (an Epicurean idea) or apathy (the Stoic view).

Paul explicitly rejects the common ideal in Athens that its citizens have no common stock with barbarians since Athenians “sprang from the soil” insisting rather that God “hath made of one blood all nations of men” (v. 26). Paul finishes this introductory lesson in Christianity with a reference to the coming judgment, proven by the resurrection of Jesus—both ideas foreign to Greek thought (cf. Bruce 361; Haenchen 526).

**Text: Post-Sermon (17:32-34)**

As with Paul’s other evangelism (13:12, 43-48; 14:1; 16:15, 34, 18:8; 19:17-18), Luke summarizes the response to the gospel at Athens.

*The resurrection of the dead.* The claim of resurrection prompts the audience to interrupt Paul. The resurrection is a necessary doctrine of the gospel and a feature of apostolic sermons. Like at Pisidian Antioch, Paul paused the gospel explanation due to the reaction of his audience (13:40-52). Paul did not reveal the identity of “that man” whom God “raised” and by whom He will “judge the world.” Jesus is not named. As already noted (see verse 18), Paul’s preaching forced two reactions, one negative (“some mocked”) and one interested (“we will hear thee again”). Readers cannot learn if or when Paul was heard again since the text ends Paul’s campaign at Athens by his departure.

*Certain men clave unto him, and believed.* Athenian response to Paul’s sermon seems to have been lukewarm. Two believers are named: “Dionysius,” whose surname may indicate his membership in the tribunal which interrogated Paul; and “a woman named Damaris” who may have been a prominent citizen, by some reckoning, since she is distinguished from the generic “others with them.” The expression *believed* (v. 34) implies that Paul continued his teaching to these who were eventually converted, then disciples, before Paul departed. The New Testament contains no record of a congregation at Athens like at Thessalonica and Corinth, nor any record of Paul returning on his third Mediterranean tour. However, the same could be said of the Bereans and Luke’s description of Berean reception to Paul’s mission preaching is unlike any other (17:11). Paul left behind a

small, hard core community of Christians at Athens as he did at Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea.

*After these things.* Luke described Paul as waiting for Timothy and Silas in Athens but, following the Areopagus sermon, the narrative continues with Paul moving on alone from Athens to Corinth (18:1). There, at Corinth, Silas and Timothy will come from Macedonia bearing information. Paul will contend with another, but different, pagan spirit at Corinth, find friends (*Aquila* and *Priscilla*), fertile soil, and stay for awhile (18:11). Some Bible commentators find in the Corinthian correspondence (2:1-5) repudiation by Paul of a failed strategy at Athens, namely, limits on the use of rhetoric in gospel preaching. By the words “I . . . when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or wisdom,” does Paul admit to Corinth a mistake at the Areopagus in accommodating the academic tastes of the philosophers on the hill? Such a view is too speculative and guilty of reading too much into the Corinthian text.

## Conclusion

As an *idea* the gospel is without a categorical peer since it is the message of Jesus the Son of God; only the Christian worldview is true; and the writings of Scripture have no philosophical equal. We do not change the gospel. The gospel changes us.

Thus, the details of the presentation of the gospel in Athens, is, in this sense, unlike the gospel in Antioch, Corinth, and Ephesus, not because the *gospel* was different but because *Athens* was. It is also in this sense, that the gospel in America is also historically unique. Our age has its own marketplace of “ideas, worldviews and philosophies” intensified by the technologies of television, the Internet and iphones.

Paul at Athens leaves a strategy to copy. He did not encode the gospel with institutional jargon leaving the Athenians without a key and without a clue; neither did he “cut-and-paste” the gospel into something more agreeable leaving them without a challenge and without a choice. Paul fabricated a sermon which fit, and at the same time sought to fix, the pre-conceived notions of his crowd so they could feel the hard edges of gospel truth, then believe and

obey. Some did and some did not. That means they understood, and that, after all, is the goal of the gospel.

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### **Biographical Sketch**

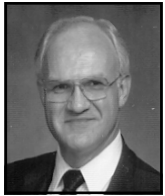
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# *The Resurrection in Acts*

*D. Gene West*

## **Introduction**

Long before modern scholars ever began debating whether Jesus came out of the Tomb alive, and collecting evidence of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead the inspired apostle declared it to be a fact. In the first recorded sermon of the Christian era, the



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apostle Peter, on the Day of Pentecost AD 30, set forth the resurrection of our Lord as the central fact of the Christian Faith. From Acts 2:22-36 we find an eloquent and stunning statement of the resurrection with two citations from Old Testament Prophecy (Ps. 16:8-11; 110:1) to reinforce his point.

Let us read his awesome words.

Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know—Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it. For David says concerning Him: I foresaw the LORD always before my face, for He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken. Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad; moreover my flesh also will rest in hope.

For You will not leave my soul in Hades, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. You have made known to me the ways of life; You will make me full of joy in Your presence. Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself: The LORD said to my Lord, Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ. (Acts 2:22-36)

This is a breath-taking passage of Scripture from which one could not draw and adequately discuss all the important aspects in two dozen sermons the length of this one. However, faith, love, reverence and respect for Christ demands what can be done should be done in the allotted time. It might be expected, in such a study, that time and attention would be devoted to 1 Corinthians 15:1-11, 20-28. While references will be made to that wonderful passage, since the Book of Acts is the theme of this lectureship, most of the time will be spent in the passage cited above. In this passage Luke recorded that Peter dealt with: (1) Old Testament Prophecy (vv. 22-31); (2) Eyewitness accounts (v. 32); and (3) The advent of the Holy Spirit (v. 33) as proofs of the resurrection of Messiah.

It should also be remembered that most of the people to whom Peter and the others spoke, were either Jews or proselytes. Most were believers in resurrection from the dead, with the exception of



Sadducees who may have been there, for they did not believe in spirits, angels, or resurrection of the dead—they were the materialists of their day. This day was a very special one in which God would cause Israel to give birth to a nation in a day (Isa. 66:8).

Assuming the vast majority of this audience also accepts the biblical teaching of resurrection of Christ, there will be no appeal to the vast storehouse of evidence that Jesus did raise from the dead—only to that which is revealed in the above passage. However, wisdom demands that in the very near future a whole lectureship be devoted to such a study, so that material can be brought to the fore in an organized, timely and convincing manner.

### **The Setting of Peter's Sermon**

The year was AD 30. The time was harvest. The day was Pentecost—fiftieth day after the resurrection of Jesus. The hour was shortly after 9:00 AM. The sermon recorded was the apostle Peter's. The audience was Jews and proselytes from across the Roman Empire. The Holy Spirit overwhelmed the apostles of Christ and they began to speak as He gave them utterance. The phenomenon of the coming of the Spirit attracted a large audience who were amazed to hear the apostles speak in their native languages. Explanations were sought. One suggestion was that the speakers were drunk! However, that could not be the case since it was the first hour of prayer in the Jewish day (third hour of the day). Peter quoted Joel 2:28-30 to refute the charge of drunkenness showing that all these events had been prophesied.

On the heels of this explanation, the Holy Spirit inspired Peter to present Jesus to them, which he did by making three salient points: (1) Jesus had been attested, set forth, shown, demonstrated (*apodeiknumi*) to be the Son of God by miracles, wonders and signs which God did through Him and they knew it! (2) According to God's scheme of Redemption they had taken Jesus and with lawless hands had crucified and slain Him. (3) God raised Him up because it was not possible for death to keep Him captive. Peter's third point in this "introduction" is the one to consume this study.

### **Old Testament Prophecy of Christ's Resurrection**

Many today are not enamored with what they call "proof texting," *i.e.*, quoting the Bible to show or prove the truthfulness of what has been said or affirmed, yet that is exactly what the apostle Peter, by the Holy Spirit's inspiration, did here. So, if there is a charge of proof texting being a poor manner of preaching thrown out, it must be thrown first at Peter and then at the Holy Spirit. There were, no doubt several passages of Old Testament prophecy the Holy Spirit and Peter could have used but Psalm 16:8-11 is the main one chosen by Deity. Peter claimed that David is the author of this Psalm, one of the most beautiful and stirring in the Old Testament. Of course, the Holy Spirit would remember who He inspired to write the passage, would He not? A brief overview of the Psalm is in order.

Though David is the spokesperson and earthly author of this Psalm, one studying the Psalm from an English translation of the Bible will find that there are differences between what the Psalm says and what Peter said. The reason for this is not that Peter was ignorant of the Psalm, nor that the Holy Spirit was mistaken in His language. The reason for the differences is that the Spirit moved Peter to quote the Septuagint (LXX) version of the Bible, a Greek translation made about 200 years BC, rather than directly from the Masoretic or some other Hebrew text. Many, if not most of the quotations of the Old Testament in the New come from that translation.

There seems to be considerable debate today regarding whether or not David spoke of himself or another. Did the writers and speakers of the New Testament merely find convenient language for the resurrection of Jesus in this Psalm and appropriate it to the Messiah though they knew David never had that in mind but confidently affirmed, of himself, that God would not desert him at death but someday restore his life. If that was David's view, then he was in error for his body did see corruption, though certainly his spirit lived on. Speaking of a view similar to this Cloer, in volume one of his work on the Psalms wrote:

Even if David is thinking this way when he writes this passage, the Holy Spirit has much more in mind. As Peter pointedly declares on the Day of Pentecost and as Paul faithfully preaches in a Jewish synagogue at Antioch of Pisidia, these words that David writes are a prediction of the resurrection of Christ (Acts 2:31; 13:35). We can be confident of this interpretation. The New Testament explanation of it settles it for us. . . . David may be writing an expression of trust in God for the indefinite future, but the Holy Spirit is uttering through him a prophetic portrayal of the greatest event of all time: Jesus' bursting forth from the dead. The Christ will not be left in the grave (or Sheol). He will not remain dead, nor will His body stay in the grave long enough to undergo decay. The deeper meaning of this psalm is realized by the unbroken fellowship Jesus has with God and His release from death's grip in that tomb outside of Jerusalem. (201-02)

To read the mind of David and know what he was thinking, at this late date, is a little difficult, but the explanation of the Holy Spirit is easily understood. There should be no difficulty with this Psalm, and there was none until certain modernists came along with new theories in biblical interpretation—perhaps biblical denial would be more appropriate.

This is a Psalm of Praise spoken to the Everlasting Father by the Messiah through the mouth of David—in reality words spoken to *Yahweh*—God the Father by *Yahweh*—God the Son. The first point made by the Speaker is that He has complete *trust* in *Yahweh* to preserve Him in His time of need. His very soul had praised *Yahweh* saying even His goodness was nothing apart from the Father and that His own soul took delight in the Saints who served the Father on Earth, because of their excellence. His second point is that those who abandoned *Yahweh* for other gods lose their relationship with the Father for their sacrifices would not be accepted by Him when they were sacrificing to idols. The Messiah would not recognize them as the people of God for when one tries

to divide his allegiance between the true God and some idol he is attempting the impossible.

The Messiah's third point is: the Father was the inheritance (He would reward) the Messiah with a good and pleasant reward though, He would be abused by men, Therefore, Messiah would praise the Father for His advice given in seasons of darkness and despair. The Messiah always looked to the Father, He was ever before Him and stood at His right hand, therefore He would not relent in carrying out the commission given Him by the Father on behalf of mankind who so sorely needed His redemption. When Messiah came to Earth to live in flesh, even then He would trust in the hope that the Father had given Him in the promise found in the 10<sup>th</sup> verse, "For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption." Though He was to die to redeem man, He would not remain dead, nor would His soul be left in the Hadean realm of Paradise (Luke 23:43).

The soul of Christ was never in Tartarus as some mistakenly believe who misunderstand and misinterpret 1 Peter 3:18-20, teaching that Jesus went to Hell between the times of His death and resurrection where he preached to the condemned. But the passage plainly teaches that Noah, in his day preached to the souls who were at the time of the death of Christ and the writing of Peter, imprisoned in Hades—those who rejected the pleas of Noah and perished in the great flood were condemned though Noah as agent of Jesus preached to them before the flood. Jesus told the thief on the cross where He was going and that he would go with Him. However, the thief's body, a body that had belonged to a soul in Paradise would see corruption just as any other body. But the assurance of the promise of the 10<sup>th</sup> verse of the Psalm was that the Father would not allow the Soul of Messiah to remain in Sheol or His body in the Grave, for it would not see corruption, i.e., it would not begin to decompose as a human body does after three days (John 11:39).

The word *Sheol* may require some brief comment. It is, according to Strong (H7582) and others roughly equivalent to the Greek idea of *Hades*—the unseen realm of the dead. *Sheol* seems, at times, to refer to that place later called Hades, however, it was

sometimes used to refer to the grave where the bodies of loved ones are put “out of sight, to the pit”—in earth burial. It also refers to near death experiences such as that of Jonah who was said to have been in *Sheol* while in the belly of the great fish. Hence, it is the “out-of-sightedness” of both the body and soul of a deceased one was *Sheol*. Assurance that the Hebrew word *Sheol* always means the same as, more or less than the word *Hades* cannot be established with certainty. Sometimes it appears to have all three connotations. It comes from a root (*shâ’êl*) which means to ask, request or inquire. Whatever the word meant to David and however the Holy Spirit was using it in this passage, it plainly means Jesus would not remain there, but would arise from the dead never to again die. Of this word, Alexander in his three-volume work on the Psalms commented appropriately when he wrote:

Believers in general are saved from the perpetual dominion of death, but Christ was saved even from the first approach of putrefaction. In this peculiar and most pregnant sense the words are applied to Christ exclusively by two apostles, and in that sense declared to be inapplicable to David. (Acts ii.29-31. xiii.35-37.) Their reasoning would utterly forbid the application to any lower subject, were it not for the ambiguity or twofold meaning of the Hebrew word, which cannot therefore be explained away without embarrassing the interpretation of this signal prophecy. (119)

Alexander called the use of the word *Sheol* in this text “ambiguous or twofold” meaning both the realm of the unseen dead and the grave in which the body of Jesus would have seen putrefaction after a sufficient amount of time. The main point is, based on the many ways the word is used in the Old Testament it seems to have no single and definite meaning, but was always dependent on its context—as words are! To this can be added: the ascension of Christ seems to have been alluded to in the 11<sup>th</sup> verse of the Psalm, or at least, Peter gave it that interpretation in verse 33a when he said, “Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God.” The

apostolic writers often connected the ascension to the resurrection, though they were separated by forty days during which Jesus made His appearances to those who would follow Him loving and teaching His Gospel.

The Jews who believed in resurrection obviously accepted this passage as a prophecy of the resurrection of the Messiah, for they did not contradict Peter. Furthermore, his points in verses 29-33 are all based on the quotation from the Psalm and the Jews acceptance of it. What would have been the value of Peter’s using the passage as a proof-text of the resurrection of the Messiah if the Jews did not accept it as having that meaning? Would the Holy Spirit do anything that disingenuous?

Peter made several vital points based on the prophecy. First, David spoke not of himself for he was “both dead and buried, and his tomb was with” them to that very day. His tomb being with them implies that he was in it; therefore, David’s body did not escape normal decomposition. As Jackson wrote on this very point, “Obviously he did not refer to himself, for ‘his tomb is with us to this day,’ meaning—we have the proof of David’s corruption!” (24). However, the person of whom David spoke in the Psalm did not see corruption or putrefaction. Second, David was the prophet to whom God swore an oath that from David’s flesh He would raise up a descendant—the Messiah, to sit on his throne. Both David and his throne had long since disappeared, accordingly the royal prophet spoke not of himself but of that descendant. Third, When David wrote Psalm 16:10 he foresaw this oath being fulfilled, so he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ. The Messiah, descendant of David would arise from the dead to fulfill God’s promise of perpetual life to the Davidic throne. At this juncture, Peter repeated the prophecy of Psalm 16:10, which the Jews would have had opportunity to refute had they not accepted it. Fourth, Peter forcefully identified the risen Messiah when he said, “**This** Jesus God has raised up.” The Messiah was not some character from their past nor one in their future. He was “**this** Jesus,” the One Whom they had crucified and slain! Where was His body—the tomb was empty, that had become general knowledge in the days between the resurrection and Pentecost. The

body had been raised up from the tomb just as the prophecy of David said it would be! None of the Jews ever denied that, but sought to stop the preaching of it. When Jesus ascended to His Father forty days later, he began His reign on David's throne. As a matter of fact, He could not accede to His throne as long as He remained dead. Jackson added an interesting comment when he said, "Since Jesus' resurrection was for the purpose of securing His enthronement, if His reign has been postponed until some future millennium, His resurrection from the dead might well have been delayed for centuries!" (25).

Perhaps at this point a sidebar on the meaning of the words "raised up" and "resurrection" is in order. The word *resurrection* found in the 31<sup>st</sup> verse is from ἀναστάσις (**anastasis**) meaning standing up, recovery, to arise. Jesus stood up from death, He recovered from death, He rose from the grave. The fact that Peter used the definite article *the* preceding *resurrection* indicates that Peter spoke of a special recovery of life, in this instance a one-time happening never to be repeated. As a matter of fact, Peter specified the resurrection of which he spoke when he said the prophet spoke of *the resurrection of the Messiah*. He spoke of a singular event either to be accepted or rejected by those who heard of it. It will not be duplicated. No such event ever preceded it, nor will such a one ever follow. The words *raised up* in the 32<sup>nd</sup> verse, in the phrase *Jesus God has raised up*, comes from ἀνίστημι (*anistēmi*) is a synonym of resurrection for it means to cause or make to stand up, to lift up, to rise again. Since Deity (the meaning of the word *theos*) was involved in the raising up of Jesus it would be proper to say that the Father raised Him up, that the Holy Spirit raised Him up, or even that the Messiah raised Himself up from the cold grip of death. So astounding was the event that the word *resurrection* is reserved for it almost exclusively, though by its definition one can say that a person who was incapacitated and recovered resurrected. It was also applied to Lazarus, and others raised from the dead in the New Testament and is applied to a general arising of the dead at the time of Judgment, but Jesus made this a very special word!

### **Eyewitnesses of the Resurrection of Christ**

On the heels of declaring that Prophecy proved that Jesus arose from the new tomb of Joseph of Arimathæa, Peter added, *of which we are all witnesses*. In 1748, Gilbert West, Clerk Extraordinary of His Majesty's most Honourable Privy Council, wrote in his defense of the resurrection of the Lord:

It was therefore absolutely necessary for the Apostles and Preachers of the Gospel to prove the Resurrection; this they did as well by their own Testimony, as by that of others, who had seen *Jesus* after he was risen. Thus St. *Paul* relates several Appearances of *Christ* to *Cephas* and others, and closes all with his own Evidence; adding, *and last of all he was seen of me also*. The Evangelists in like manner produce many Instances, of the same Nature. St. *Matthew* speaks of two, St. *Mark* of three, St. *Luke* of as many, and St. *John* of four; each of them selecting such as best suited with the Purpose they had in View when they wrote their Gospels. (21)

The word *witness* comes from the same word as martyr—μάρτυρες (*martus*). When the martyrs died for Jesus their death gave testimony—witnessed of their faith in Him. The word *witness* means to see, hear, or know by personal presence or perception. It also means to attest, or testify to the truthfulness of anything. When one witnesses a will, for example, his signature is a testimony that the signature that appears on the will is really of the person whose will it is. Both these concepts were involved in the preaching and teaching by the apostles of Christ.

However, Luke and Peter added a dimension when they used still another word for what the apostles were as far as the life and teachings of Christ were concerned. In Luke 1:2, that master writer said that those who companied with Jesus during His earthly sojourn were *from the beginning eyewitnesses* of all those things that were surely believed among them. The word *eyewitnesses* in the original meant to be a looker-on, to watch and see anything. Peter used a similar word when in 2 Peter 1:16 he spoke of himself

and other disciples being *eyewitnesses of His majesty*. This word, very similar to that used by Luke, also means an on-looker, one who watches the activities of another very carefully. The testimony of eyewitnesses is incontrovertible in any court on earth, and should be believed because the kind of evidence it is. John explained the entire evidential circumstance upon which the apostles knew Messiah had resurrected when he wrote:

That which was from the beginning, which *we have heard*, which *we have seen with our eyes*, which we have looked upon, and *our hands have handled*, concerning the Word of life—the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—that which *we have seen and heard we declare to you*, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. (1 John 1:1-3, emp. added)

This is a declaration of empirical evidence that cannot be denied unless one can prove that John lied—no one has ever done that. Then there is the testimony of Thomas on the third Lord’s Day after the resurrection—after he had investigated the wounds of Jesus. Perhaps this is what John refers to when he said the apostles *handled* Jesus. Thomas saw and felt the wounds, then awestricken by what he had investigated, he declared, “My Lord and My God!” When the eyewitness speaks all dispute comes to an end—unless he can be discredited, for it is not doubted and is acceptable in any court in the land.

The number of people who saw the resurrected Savior was/is nothing short of astounding. There were between five and six hundred some of whom saw Him on multiple occasions and five hundred who all saw Him at the same time. As a matter of fact, Luke said Jesus discoursed—spoke at length, the meaning of *λέγω*, with the apostles of things concerning the kingdom for a period of forty days after His resurrection (Acts 1:3). These were not momentary visits, but the Lord spent time with them. In addition it

should be asked how would it be possible for more than five hundred people to see an apparition, or have the same hallucination all at once? To hold the view that all the eyewitnesses of the resurrected Christ were either seeing apparitions (non-existent ghosts) or having hallucinations is far more difficult to believe than the resurrection. To accept that kind of explanation for the appearances of Jesus following that resurrection morning is to display credulity that is incredible!

Of this event being mythological, as is often claimed, T. C. Edwards wrote in his classic commentary on 1 Corinthians:

The risen Jesus was seen by trustworthy witnesses, and this had already formed part of the Apostles’ testimony at Corinth. These verses (1 Cor. 15:5-8, par. added) were written within twenty-five years after the date of the supposed event. The Apostle Paul declares that these witnesses affirmed that they had seen Jesus after His resurrection. This is fatal to the theory that the resurrection of Jesus is a myth gradually gathering around His memory. So stupendous a myth could not have formed and crystallized before the date of this Epistle, still less before the arrival of Paul in Corinth. (394-95)

Of course, those who mistakenly see it as a myth, claim that it did not grow up until the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> century after Christ. This makes Paul, Peter and others, recounting a myth more than two-hundred years before it came into existence!

Edwards referred to the eyewitnesses as “trustworthy.” That invokes the discussion of whether or not this designation is true. Were these eyewitnesses trustworthy, were they credible—can their word be accepted as true? Writing on the subject of the credibility of the eyewitnesses of the resurrected Christ, Wayne Jackson in his more than excellent book entitled *The Bible on Trial* wrote at length on the matter. We will not begin to quote all that he wrote, but we refer the reader to chapter two of that great book. In this chapter Jackson made some unassailable points regarding this matter and those who have not read it have missed several of the

truly great arguments proving the credibility of these eyewitnesses. Jackson wrote:

In considering this issue, it is only appropriate that one reflect upon the qualifications necessary to establish a *bona fide* witness, and thus determine the character of his testimony. Consider the following criteria essential for a credible witness, and how the testimony of the New Testament writers meets the standard required. (15)

Jackson then went on to identify the elements of a credible or authentic eyewitness. He listed and discussed each one showing clearly these were characteristics common to all the apostles and the other New Testament writers. The characteristics Jackson listed are: *competent*, *informed* and *integrity*. In his 1748 work, West added still another dimension which would not appeal either to the world, or the religious world in this day, but certainly makes an impact on the believer in the sacredness of Scripture when he wrote:

It is therefore highly reasonable to suppose that the same Spirit, which incited and enabled the Apostles to preach the Gospel, and bear Witness to the Resurrection of *Jesus Christ* in every Nation of the known World, should likewise incite and enable them to deliver down to Posterity, in a Method the least liable to Uncertainty and Error, that Testimony, and those Precepts, upon which the Faith and Practice of After-times were to be established. . . . (134)

He is simply saying if God inspired these apostles to preach the message of the resurrection He also inspired them to write it. It can therefore be read as reliable testimony because the Holy Spirit who is God cannot lie. If faith in the God breathed Scriptures was as much intact now as it was in 1748 this would be seen as an unassailable argument. Indeed, if the testimony was inspired of God, it cannot—it must not be doubted!

Jackson proceeded to demonstrate eyewitnesses were competent, informed, and possessors of great integrity. Then he asked another important question which cannot be answered without declaring the whole of the New Testament a myth. Unfortunately some are willing to do this! His inquiry was, “What did the authors of the New Testament documents have to gain for their testimony in support of Christ and his system of religious teaching?” He then pointed out that all the apostles save one died a martyr’s death, and he was exiled. Read 2 Corinthians 11:24-28 to see a record of Paul’s “gain.” Most do not consider that gain! These men were beaten, imprisoned, exiled, stoned and abused in every conceivable way for preaching an event that never took place! This is the most incredible thing imaginable! Yet, Paul no doubt echoed the sentiments of all the apostles and most of the early saints when he declared that he willingly suffered the loss of all things that he might gain Christ and be found in Him. From Philippians 3:8-11 we find these words:

Yet indeed I also *count all things loss* for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have *suffered the loss of all things*, and *count them as rubbish*, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. (emp. added)

It is hard to fathom how much the early Saints lost in order to serve Jesus. The early eyewitnesses were treated with a greater disdain and harshness than later Saints who were often persecuted unto death, for we learn from the apostle Paul that all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution (2 Tim. 3:12). Were they credible? Oh, yes, none but the most credible would suffer as they did, all receiving pain and none finding gain, to tell the story of the living Savior that they had seen with their own

eyes. Jesus said that what the eyewitnesses saw on the third day was the ultimate sign of His Messiahship. From Matthew 12:39-40 we read:

But He answered and said to them, an evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

When this period of time expired Jesus walked out of the new tomb of Joseph of Arimathaea never to die again. This was an event proved by prophecy which spoke of its coming and the truthfulness of the prophecy was confirmed by the eyewitnesses who saw Him alive after His passion and knew that it occurred—a fact they never questioned!

Peter also declared Jesus to be Messiah in the 32<sup>nd</sup> verse. Previously (vv. 30-31) he spoke of the resurrection of “the Christ,” however, in the 32<sup>nd</sup> verse he said “this Jesus God has raised up,” thus connecting the two—His name and His title. If one accepted the resurrection of Messiah and God raised “this Jesus,” then it follows that “this Jesus” was “the Christ”—Messiah. It was this Jesus Whom God approved (v. 22), the One Whom they crucified and slew—Whom God raised up (vv. 23-24). So, he began by identifying the One raised, appealed to Scripture to prove the Messiah would arise, then said Jesus was the One who bestowed what they were seeing and hearing.

However, Peter gave a third proof of the resurrection of Jesus in the 33<sup>rd</sup> verse. He said, “Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear” (Acts 2:33). As David implied in the last verse of the 16<sup>th</sup> Psalm, Messiah would ascend back to the Father after His resurrection. He gave no particulars regarding this event, but Peter asserted that it took place, a fact he could attest to since he saw the ascension of Jesus and a cloud receiving Him out of the sight of the apostles

some ten days prior to the events of this chapter. That Jesus was at the right hand of the Father, Peter could not know empirically, so he once again resorted to prophecy quoting this time from Psalm 110:1—“The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, til I make Your enemies Your footstool.” The Father had revealed through the Psalmist that the Messiah would be resurrected in order to ascend back to the Father and establish His kingdom there. This fact may not have been fully understood by the Psalmist.

God decided to give audible and visible demonstrations of the resurrection at the same time He gave the apostles utterance. He sent the Holy Spirit as a proof of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. What better witness than a member of the Godhead? For believing persons there could be no doubt of Jesus’ resurrection, but for the unbeliever it was a fantastic story that had to have some authentication. God saved another event that could be apprehended by all present to prove that the resurrection had taken place. It was a demonstration that could both be heard and seen. They heard the sound of a mighty rushing wind (tornado). Every man heard the Gospel in his own native tongue. There could be no doubt of this. As a matter of fact, it was a discussion of the meaning of such noises that brought Peter’s sermon in the first place. But God was not yet finished with these people—they saw the divided tongues like fire sitting on the apostles as they each spoke to people in their own languages on that day. Therefore, the events of Pentecost began with a theophany of the Holy Spirit that proved to any thinking person that Jesus was not still dead for He received the promise of the Father that He would send the Spirit to aid the apostles and Saints in working signs, wonders and miracles.

McGarvey spoke of these events and that the coming of the Spirit proved the exaltation of Jesus. If it proved the exaltation of the Lord then it proved the resurrection, for proving either proves the other one! Therefore, McGarvey wrote as follows:

His proof is not the fact recited in the introductory chapter of Acts, that he and his companions had seen Jesus ascend into heaven; for this would have been unavailing, seeing that their eyes followed him no farther than the cloud which

received him out of their sight; but it is that which his hearers were witnessing with their own eyes and ears, the fact that he and his companions were speaking as the Holy Spirit gave them utterance, while the tongues of flame sat upon their heads. In saying that Jesus had been exalted by the right hand of God, Peter spoke that which neither he nor any other mortal could know except by direct revelation, but as the direct revelation was manifested before the people, it was clear that the testimony given was that of the Holy Spirit himself, who had just descended from heaven where the exaltation had taken place. Here was testimony which no sane man among the Jews could think of calling in question. (34)

Furthermore, Jesus had received from the Father a promise of the Holy Spirit. There are several interpretations of what the promise of the Holy Spirit was, or the Lord's receiving from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit. In the context, especially viewing Psalm 16:10, it is most logical to assert it is the promise found in the 10<sup>th</sup> verse of that Psalm. This seems to be the most viable, i.e., that He would not remain in *Sheol* and His body would not begin to decompose. That promise was made through David the Prophet. It is also understood to mean that God had promised Jesus that after He left the world to go to a better one, the Father would not leave His apostles as orphans, but would send the Holy Spirit to them. Since Jesus would be no longer with them to care for and guide them, the Spirit would come to do so. Jesus made this promise to the apostles in John 14:26; 16:26. It would seem that the Father made the promise to Jesus and the Spirit fulfilled it according to the will of Jesus.

However, there is another equally viable explanation which Stringer set forth in his commentary *The Book of Acts*. He pointed out—after admitting the explanation given above is one that is grammatical and viable as well as reasonable, that there is another equally grammatical, reasonable and scriptural as the one above. He wrote:

It is also possible, however, for the phrase, **promise of the Holy Ghost**, to mean that the Holy Spirit made the promise. If this is the correct meaning then the point is that Jesus received from the Father the fulfillment of the promise that the Holy Spirit had made concerning him. . . . The promise regarding Jesus that is under discussion is not a promise he would receive the Spirit; rather, it is a promise that was given by the Spirit—namely, the promise of his resurrection and exaltation. The Spirit had made this promise through the prophets (2 Peter 1:21), and Peter quoted a number of the Spirit's prophecies related to this promise. The Father fulfilled the Spirit's promise when he raised Christ and exalted him. Peter connects the fulfillment of that promise with the fact that Jesus **hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear**. Peter's audience had seen and heard marvelous things. They had seen fire-like tongues, and heard a sound like a mighty, rushing wind, and heard the apostles speak in languages they would have been unable to speak except by divine power. Jesus' sending forth of these miraculous manifestations was proof positive that he was indeed exalted in heaven. Peter had cited the apostles' eyewitness testimony as proof that the Spirit's words had been fulfilled; now he cited the supernatural occurrences the audience had witnessed. (38-39)

As was stated earlier, whatever proved the exaltation of Jesus to the right hand of the Father also proved His resurrection from the dead. Thank God He lives!

Peter then emphasized that David could not have been speaking of himself, for at the time of his death he did not ascend into the heaven. As Reese said, "David is not the one who David predicted would ascend to heaven, Peter argues. Peter reminds his listeners that David even bore testimony to the fact that Messiah would ascend to Heaven and be exalted" (71). The One of Whom he spoke was that magnificent descendant to whom Yahweh said, "Sit at My right hand till I make Your enemies Your footstool." Notice



the first clause in this prophecy from Psalm 110:1 is, “the Lord said to my Lord.” There are two different words both translated LORD in this clause. The LORD who did the speaking was *Yahweh*—the self-existent eternal One and the One to Whom He spoke was *Adoni*—sovereign ruler and controller. Hence, the Father spoke this to His Son Jesus. In order to sit in exaltation at the right hand of *Yahweh*, *Adoni* had to ascend to Heaven and in order to ascend and sit He had to resurrect from the dead!

Recall that the first word of the 33<sup>rd</sup> verse is “therefore.” Peter was about to advance a conclusion based on what he had previously said, *viz.*, “This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses”—therefore He was exalted to the right hand of God and from His place of exaltation “He poured out this which you now see and hear.” The Holy Spirit would not have come had He not been “shed forth”—ἐκχύνω, poured forth or bestowed. It was this bestowing they were witnessing. If they refused to believe the testimony of Peter and the others—surely they would accept the demonstration before their own eyes and ears! They were unable to deny the roaring sound from the sky, the divided tongues like fire on the apostles or that the apostles spoke in their own languages and if that was happening to them, they had the evidence to conclude that Jesus resurrected from the dead. Bock summarized this portion of the sermon nicely when he said:

What happened as a result of the resurrection? The verse begins with “therefore” (οὖν, *oun*) to make the application. Peter makes three points, the first two of which set up the third. (1) Jesus was exalted to/by the right hand of God—language that alludes to Ps. 110:1 and sets up the citation of the psalm in verses 34-35. (2) He received from the Father the promise of the Spirit. In light of what Luke already has taught in Luke-Acts, this affirmation points to the realization of the messianic promise (Luke 3:16-17; 24:49; Acts 1:4-5). Jesus serves as an active figure in salvation and a mediator of God’s blessings that lead to salvation and righteousness. The distribution of the Spirit is a messianic executive act (Turner 1996: 303-6) . . . (3) As a result,

Jesus has poured out what the audience sees and hears, that is, the gift of the Spirit. (130-31)

On that particular day, the coming of the Holy Spirit with audible and visual signs was the ultimate evidence for Peter’s hearers, for they could not deny what they saw and heard. Therefore, the only reasonable thing they could do was to accept the truth Peter and the others spoke. Modern man needs to do the very same thing! Without acceptance of this fact no soul will ever see God nor bask in His Heavenly light, for as West said, it is one of “those Precepts, upon which the Faith and Practice of After-times were to be established” (134). Nothing about the life of the Messiah is trite, blasé or unimpressive, yet the half has never yet been told, for John said, “And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written” (John 21:25).

### Conclusion

When people turn their minds away from something as vital to their salvation as the event called *the resurrection*, an occurrence that is so well documented that no reasonable person will deny it, and turn their minds to such folly as macroevolution, they need to have an attitude adjustment. It takes greater and more foolish faith to believe that mankind evolved from a pit of slime than it does to believe in either the creation or the resurrection. Both are events that could have happened while the other is a foolish figment of the imagination. Yet, faith in the raising of Jesus from the dead is laughed at and mocked while evolution is accepted and applauded. Paul surely described that kind of thinking when he wrote in Romans 1:28 “And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting.” *fin*

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**Biographical Sketch**

West is a native of Hancock County, WV. He currently serves the Hillview Terrace Church of Christ in Moundsville, WV, as preacher and teaches at WVSOP. He married the former Shirley Bissett of Greene County, PA. They are the parents of three children; grandparents to seven. He has authored several books. Almost all are commentaries on the New Testament books which he teaches at West Virginia School of Preaching. He has also written several tracts on various subjects. His preaching of the

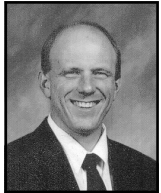
Lord has spanned 57 years, and he hopes to continue a few more D. V. of course.

# Paul's Commitment

Andy Robison

## A Committed Anti-Christian

Before Paul was a Christian, he was an anti-Christ. 1 John 2:22a marks with that moniker any denier of the Savior's Deity. Who knows when he became such? Was he a witness to the crowds Jesus drew in His three-year teaching career? Having been



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brought up at the feet of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), Paul likely was a resident of Jerusalem during the momentous ministry of the Christ. Had he heard him teach? Had he argued with any who tended to believe? Inspired history leaves us only to guess.

That history begins with Saul only after the Lord's death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. Luke writes of a young man who, likely as an instigator rather than an underling (Roper 271) watched the cloaks of those who freed themselves from an outer garment's restraint to make their arms more flexible in the hurling of stones at evangelist Stephen (Acts 7:58; 22:20). In understatement, Luke then records, "Now Saul was consenting to his death" (Acts 8:1). It is no accident that this statement catapults into the documentation of a widespread persecution against the church. For this Saul, who would later be called Paul (Acts 13:9), occasionally reflects back on his life before his crucifixion with Christ (Gal. 2:20) with confessed regret.

I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women, as also the high priest

bears me witness, and all the council of the elders, from whom I also received letters to the brethren, and went to Damascus to bring in chains those who were there to Jerusalem to be punished. (Acts 22:4-5)

For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. (1 Cor. 15:9)

For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. (Gal. 1:13)

This "chief" of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15) "breath(ed) threats and murders against the disciples of the Lord" (Acts 9:1). If a modern cliché were used to paraphrase that thought, it might be Paul ate, slept, and breathed vengeance upon those Christians. The breathing might indicate some deep agitation of emotion (Reese 349). "Threats and murders" might be an implicit reference to a dual legal procedure of warnings and punishments (Jackson 101). To him, they were rebellious rabble-rousers who no longer accepted the long-validated Mosaic Law. The religion he had learned from the best of the law-guarding Pharisees (Acts 22:3; 5:34; Philip. 3:5), the economy of animal sacrifice and pursuant money changing he had known since childhood (cf. John 2:13-17; Matt. 21:12), and likely the beliefs of his family and friends back in the Roman free city (Reese 812-13) of Tarsus of Cilicia (Acts 22:3) were threatened by the societal upheaval in Israel if the announced King of the Jews (John 18:37) had His way. A man who had it made as one of respectful family stock (Philip. 3:5), educational credentials (Philip. 3:6), political connections (Acts 22:5; Gal. 1:14) and presumably, reasonable wealth was willing, yea, zealous (Philip. 3:6; Acts 8:3; Gal. 1:14), to wipe the name of Christ from history before it would ever have the chance to be written. (It is possible he was even being a member of the San Hedrin before whom Jesus would have appeared [Matt. 27:57], if the phrase "cast my vote" [Acts 26:10] could be construed literally,

and if he were at one time married, unrecorded by Scripture [Coffman 478], but this is doubtful [Jackson 329]. Of the correctness of his inflammatory commitment, he harbored no doubt (Acts 26:9-11).

Fiery persons have a way of giving their all to whatever they are doing. Oh, how beneficial it is when a sharp-eyed adult can find a young person who might be acting out in rebellion and gently, compassionately mentor that angst to knowledgeable zeal for the cause of Christ (cf. Rom. 10:1-2)!

### **A Convert's Commencement**

The sharp, prophetic eye of the Lord watched patiently as Saul “made havoc of the church” (Acts 8:3), but omnisciently seized the right time for intervention. As Saul, with procured warrants in hand (Acts 9:2; 22:5), sought Damascene saints to harass, the Lord, in some brief span, showed Himself to (1 Cor. 15:8), shone a blinding light upon, and spoke to the misguided zealot (Acts 9:2-9; 22:6-11; 26:12-18). Not saved by the vision, but later by the obedience (Acts 9:6, 18; 22:16), his turning point of repentance was quickly evidenced by an immediately redirected passion (Acts 9:20). At some point, though, after his conversion, and before the bulk of his magnificent ministry, he “played catch-up,” as it were, with the other apostles (who had followed the Lord some three years), with a three-year retreat to Arabia to receive the revelation of the Lord (Gal. 1:11-18). Commencing then was the evangelistic career that would advance the Gospel before “Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel,” and turn, in one of history’s most extreme pendulum swings, the persecutor into likely the one man ever most severely and consistently punished for his dedication to the Lord he had once rejected.

There are those who say Paul selfishly, without authorization, commandeered Christianity and formed it, for the ages, into a system the Lord and the eleven never intended (Loflin, Asadi). Galatians 1 is an implicit, anticipatory defense against such foolishness. Paul never received instruction from any man on the fullness of the Gospel (after his conversion), but directly from the Lord. Then, he came out preaching the same doctrine as “keys-to-

the-kingdom” Peter (cf. Matt. 16:18-19) and the rest of the early church leaders (cf. Acts 15). They were in one accord. Would an omniscient and omnipotent Lord allow His planned and prophesied religion (Eph. 1:4) to be hijacked by a Pharisaic pretender? No, rather, Paul was a part of the plan to carry the Gospel to the “end of the earth” (Acts 1:8; 9:15-16; 26:17-18).

Never miss it, brethren, the Lord’s resurrection has the power to change one who so calls on the name of the Lord through faith, repentance, and baptism (1 Peter 3:21; Eph. 1:19). The word of God spoken in the world’s last dispensation via the Son (Heb. 1:1-2), has the everlasting power to not return void (Isa. 55:11), but allow a new birth (1 Peter 1:22-25) with a new meaning and resurgent strength in a new purpose (1 Cor. 15:10). The God of our Lord Jesus Christ “works all things according to the counsel of His will” (Eph. 1:11), doing “exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think” (Eph. 3:20). He can take the most miserably failed sinner and turn him into the most successful (albeit, perhaps, suffering [Acts 9:16]) saint.

### **A Crucifixion with Christ**

The day Paul was baptized was the day Paul died. “I am crucified with Christ...” (Gal. 2:20) said the one who, in following the Lord’s teaching about self-denial (Luke 9:23-24), was willing to change everything about his life to conform to the Lord’s will. His laundry list of honors in Judaism (Philip. 3:3-6) is followed by this life-attesting statement of his transformation:

But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His

sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection of the dead. (Philip. 3:7-11)

Conformation to the death of Jesus Christ came when Paul was willing to give himself fully to the Master's will. He harbored no desires to keep his earthly status; he could not go on at all in his previous way. He had died to all of that. He had "become dead to the law through the body of Christ" (Rom. 7:4). He had died to sin when he reenacted, in an authorized and demanded figure, the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (Rom. 6:2-6). His new life would be one in which he, indeed, shared in the fellowship of Christ's sufferings (Philip. 3:10).

### **A Mandated Ministry**

This converted sinner considered himself set apart from his mother's womb (Gal. 1:15). Without teaching individual predestination of a world-wide scale, and without (though it may be beyond man's comprehension as to how) breaking the Divinely granted barrier of a human being's free will, Paul had come to this position by appointment. His future was foretold to his reluctant teacher, Ananias (Acts 9:15-16), and to Saul himself (Acts 26:15-18). Thus, he considered it a granted grace to "preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph. 3:8), and labored diligently to show that God's grace toward him would not be in vain (1 Cor. 15:9-10).

No one today should claim such a heavenly mandate as had Paul. Nevertheless, all who seek to follow the Lord can and must learn from his pattern (1 Cor. 11:1) of self-denial and zealous service. Each soldier has his duty (2 Tim. 2:3-4), each laborer has his talent (Matt. 25:14-30), each part of the body has his function (1 Cor. 12). These are to be selflessly employed for the Lord.

Paul became known as the "apostle to the Gentiles" (Rom. 11:13). It was not that he did no preaching to Jews—no, he frequented their synagogues and gathering places in the cities he evangelized (Acts 13:5, 15; 14:1; 17:1-2, 10-11, 17; 18:4, 19, 26; 19:8). It was not that he had no heart for saving his kinsmen in the flesh (cf. Rom. 9:1-4). Rather, the designation likely comes from

his position in church history as the perfect ambassador to carry the Gospel according to the Savior's geographical plan (cf. Acts 1:8).

*The Acts of the Apostles*, as the singular volume of inspired church history has come to be known, really focuses on just two of the Lord's special messengers. Peter's ministries consume most of Acts 1-12, with some introduction to Saul's story. Peter preached the Gospel mostly to Jewish crowds, but also opened the doors of the kingdom to the first Gentile converts (Acts 10-11). As the Gospel began to spread beyond the regions of its seminal point, Jerusalem, into the regions of Judea, and Samaria, it was ready to burst forth into the "uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8, KJV). The Lord could have chosen Peter, or anyone, for that matter, to be the carrier of the message to a Gentile, idolatry-laden world caught up in mythology-ridden Roman customs and culture, but he chose the apostle Paul.

Paul was the perfect, as it were, mediator between the Jewish world that birthed Christianity and the Roman world that, however reluctantly, needed it. The Lord knows the need for qualified ambassadorship. When someone was needed to serve as a go-between for the enslaved Israelites and the empowered Egyptians, God chose Moses, a man whose birth circumstances providentially placed him simultaneously in the palace of the Pharaoh and the arms of his Hebrew mother (Ex. 1-2; cf. Acts 7:22). It did not hurt that he prepared him with forty years in the wilderness as a shepherd for the time after his confrontation with Pharaoh (Ex. 3-4). That seems a typological precursor to the mediating done by the God who became Man, so as to be able to serve between the two (1 Tim. 2:5). The theme is not lost on Paul, who was born in the free city of Tarsus in Cilicia, and would have thus known Roman customs and religion well. He was even a Roman citizen by birth (Acts 22:28) and not by purchase. This, argues Reese, would not be by virtue of geographical birth, since that would only apply to a Roman colony, and not a free city. Thus, says the same author, it must have been that one of Paul's Jewish parents had been conferred citizenship somehow, and Paul's citizenship was by

virtue of descent (Reese 812-13). The inimitable Sir William Ramsay speculates,

Now, if Paul's family had merely emigrated to Tarsus from Judaea some years before his birth, neither he nor his father would have been "Tarsians," but merely "residents" (*incolae*). It is probable, but not certain, that the family had been planted in Tarsus with full rights as part of a colony settled there by one of the Seleucid kings in order to strengthen their hold on the city. Such a re-foundation took place at Tarsus, for the name Antiocheia was given it under Antiochus IV (175-164 B.C.). The Seleucid kings seem to have had a preference for Jewish colonists in their foundations in Asia Minor. Citizenship in Tarsus might also have been presented to Paul's father or grandfather for distinguished services to the State; but that is much less probable. (31-32)

However achieved, this citizenship would have had its educational and assimilating effects upon the young man.

According to the law of his country, he was first of all a Roman citizen. That character superseded all others before the law and in the general opinion of society; and placed him amid the aristocracy of any provincial town. In the first century, when the citizenship was still jealously guarded, the *civitas* may be taken as a proof that his family was one of distinction and at least moderate wealth. It also implies that there was in the surroundings amid which he grew up, a certain attitude of friendliness to the Imperial government (for the new citizens in general, and the Jewish citizens in particular, were warm partisans of their protector, the new Imperial regime), and also of pride in a possession that ensured distinction and rank and general respect in Tarsus. . . .He was not merely a person born in Tarsus, owing to the accident of his family being there: he had a citizen's rights in Tarsus. We may confidently

assume that Paul was careful to keep within demonstrable law and custom, when he claimed to be a Tarsian citizen in describing himself to the Tribune. (30-31)

Thus, Paul's Roman credentials were well established.

It must have been at some early age that his parents shipped him off to Jerusalem to study at the feet of respected Rabbi Gamaliel (Acts 5:34; 22:3) (Jackson 282). So embedded in the Jewish tradition was he that he remarkably described himself as not just a Hebrew, but "a Hebrew of the Hebrews" (Philip. 3:5), a distinction whose significance Ramsay illuminated:

The expression is a remarkable one. It is used not to a Jewish audience, but to a Greek Church (Phil. III 5), and it is similar to a familiar expression among the Greeks: 'a priest *sprung* from priests' is a term commonly applied to members of the great sacerdotal families which play so important a part in the society of Asian cities. He was a Jew at least as much as he was a Tarsian and a Roman, as regards his early surroundings; and it is obvious that the Jewish side of his nature and education proved infinitely the most important, as his character developed. (32)

The Gospel was not Judaism, but it grew out of its prophecies. It was the tutor to bring to Christ (Gal. 3:24-25). Paul learned it from the very best. He could recite the Israelite history (Acts 13) and speak intelligibly of secular culture to the sophisticated Athenians (Acts 17:28). He was perfectly suited to be the ambassador (cf. 2 Cor. 5:20) bridging the two cultures!

What if he had not chosen to do so? How would the world look? People of faith can reasonably believe God would have found another way, but it appears Paul came on the scene for just "such a time as this" (cf. Esth. 4:14). And what of modern Christians seeking to learn from Paul's traits? Though not in similar circumstances, they do find themselves in some situations. The church in which they worship needs their help, a friend or neighbor needs assistance, the proclamation of the Gospel needs a voice.

The Lord can match talents with needs. Christians just need to be willing to use their talents. What might be said of a man, for example, who is qualified in every way to be an elder (1 Tim. 3; Titus 1), except that his lack of desire (1 Tim. 3:1) restrains him and thus keeps the local congregation from the necessary plurality? Has he shirked by a lame excuse the role for which he might have been prepared?

### **A Joyful Journey—Well, of a Suffering Sort**

From a prison cell (Philip. 1:13), Paul characteristically called on readers to rejoice in contentment (Philip. 4:4, 10-13). How one could so design is beyond someone who knows not the foundational joy of Christ. It is, though, quite apparent to one who shares the sort of commitment the apostle Paul exhibited.

Consider his known career in Acts. Upon his conversion he “immediately” preached (Acts 9:20), only to have his ministry interrupted by his Arabian preparation (Gal. 1:13-18). His initial attempt to “join the disciples” (Acts 9:26) was only successful due to the mediation of a previously known, magnanimous disciple (Acts 4:36-37; 9:27). The church bridging the Jewish culture to the Gentile world with the message of Christianity seemed to be Antioch—it became a transition point for relief to Judea (Acts 11:29-30) and launching point for missionary journeys (Acts 11:19-20, 22, 26; 12:25-13:3; 14:21, 26; 15:22-23, 30-40). Paul, at first, remained a year there teaching (Acts 11:26). Was he “getting his legs”?

Paul’s journey would never be one of self-glory, but of hardship and sacrifice mixed with evangelistic success. Confronted by a sorcerer in Cyprus he and Barnabas still made a notable convert (Acts 13:6-12). Envious Jews in Antioch in Pisidia angrily challenged the success among both Gentiles and Jews (Acts 13:46-52). Hailed first as a god in Lystra, Paul was then stoned, drug out of the city and left for dead, an encounter made noble by his valorous reaction of rising and returning straightway to the city to strengthen the disciples (Acts 14:8-22). At Jerusalem he, like many preachers still have to do, boldly took on the brethren (Acts 15:12). Distraught over the first trip’s deserter (Acts 13:13), he would not

give up on the Gospel (Acts 15:36-40). Following the Macedonian call, he did not regret his Philippian stay, although it resulted in so much torture mixed with his success (Acts 16:11-40). Even as he “turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6), he was chased by incensed unbelievers from one municipality to another (Acts 17:13-15). Still, the provocation of his heart by any religious falsehood compelled (2 Cor. 5:14) him (Acts 17:16).

He would work with his hands to support his ministry, if it would help keep others from stumbling (Acts 18:3; 1 Cor. 9:12, 15). Yet, being a human being, he might get down about his business (cf. 2 Cor. 11:28), and be spurred on by a reassuring direction from the Lord (Acts 18:10-11; 23:11). He was willing to confront a riot at Ephesus, being held back only by disciples concerned for his safety (Acts 19:30). Was this the impetus of the (if so, metaphorical) reference to fighting with beasts there (1 Cor. 15:32)? Warned prophetically of captivity in Jerusalem, he insisted on going there still, until his beloved disciples acquiesced (Acts 21:11-14). Willing to go to all the lengths he could to make peace with his physical brethren, it only yielded him false accusation, unjust arrest, and opportunity to address an angry mob (Acts 21:15-39). He did (Acts 22:1-21), and the truth only made them angrier (Acts 22:22).

It was then that he began his climb up the ladder of judicial command. Before Gentile rulers, kings, and the council of Israel (Acts 9:15) he made his defense, all the while incarcerated and being sent to the next level, one time by his appeal (Acts 25:11). From Claudius Lysias, the Roman commander of the garrison (Acts 21:31; 23:26) to the Roman governor Felix (Acts 24), through a two-year wait for his successor, Festus (Acts 24:27; 25:1-12), with a diversionary appearance to King Agrippa and his sister, Bernice (Acts 26) Paul was subjected to the nobles of the day. At what point does one give up, clam up, and become embittered? Never for Paul. Happiness in opportunity characterized this saint of God (cf. Acts 26:2; Eph. 6:18-20).

Entering a long prisoner transport across the turbulent waters of the Mediterranean Sea at the most difficult time of year (Jackson 343), Paul warned the sailors, then announced their spared lives

after his apparent fast and prayer (Acts 27:9-11, 21-25). Guiding the doomed soldiers and prisoners through the intricacies of a shipwreck, the soldiers would still have killed Paul (to prevent his escape) were it not for an interceding centurion (in the right place at the right time?) (Acts 27:26-42). Even after all of that, the humble servant who should have rightfully commanded the allegiance of those he had helped spare was one who was gathering sticks for the fire (Acts 28:3). He had learned an attitude of service well from the risen Lord (Mark 10:45; Philip. 2:5-11).

Arriving in Rome to await his appealed appearance before Nero Caesar, Paul quickly sought out the Jews (Acts 28:17ff.) There, in the heart of the Roman Empire, this ambassador of the two cultures, and apostle of the “new and living way” (Heb. 10:20), sought continuing construction of the bridge that is Christ’s all-encompassing kingdom (John 18:36; Gal. 3:28).

How fitting, for that had always been his goal. Note that nothing got in the way of his pressing toward that goal (cf. Philip. 3:13-14). No matter the suffering, no bother the beasts (cf. 1 Cor. 15:32). Neither the mayhem of mindless mobs (Acts 19, 21-22), nor the filleting of his flesh by the flagellum (Acts 16:23; 2 Cor. 11:24) could keep the apostle from his purpose. With laser-like focus, he shut out the world’s distractions and trumpeted the message of the cross and the Christ (Gal. 6:14; 1 Cor. 2:1-5) throughout the Mediterranean world. Knowing the love of Christ was of the utmost consistency (Rom. 8:35-39), he aimed to return that love with undying commitment. When he had to in order to defend his apostleship, he would point not to his letters from presumed authorities (2 Cor. 3:1-3), but to his sufferings (2 Cor. 6:3-10; 11:22-33). He would tell others, “For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake” (Philip. 1:29). These, be assured, were not empty words from an ivory tower of luxury to a poor peasantry on the proverbial front lines. Paul lived and exemplified this truth: “having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me” (Philip. 1:30).

### **Commitment’s Benefits**

Imagine a world without Paul’s commitment. The suffering of the Savior would still be enough to call men to service, to be sure. But, present Christian consciousness would lack the benefit of likely the most extreme conversion ever known. Paul’s commitment calls Christians to:

*Character Emulation.* How much better is the character of those who can call on a higher, more intense sacrifice than their own. When troubles toil the soul, the lesser sufferer is emboldened by the greater. “Look at what Paul endured,” one might reason. “If he got through that, I can get through this.” And look at what he said, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:18).

*Brotherhood Betterment.* Paul’s enthusiasm was not for his own wellbeing. Does the careful reader of Luke’s history notice the subtle use of Paul’s citizenship for the ease of the brotherhood? Why appeal to Roman citizenship to demand an apology, as it were, from magistrates guilty of an unjust decree to inflict a beating (Acts 16:22, 35-40)? Might it have been to subtly slow any future harassment of the brethren at the hands of unthinking judges? Why return to a town where beating had been the dismissal (Acts 14:19-20)—to strengthen those who could not leave?

Commitment not only serves one’s own soul, it is vital to the success of the brotherhood. Half-hearted, nominal Christians endanger themselves and are a constant drag on the hearts of the more faithful. Rather, “...let us consider one another, in order to stir up love and good works” (Heb. 10:24).

*Finishing Fervor.* Paul “was not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul” (Heb. 10:39). Being one who fought to the finish (2 Tim. 4:6-8), he paved a better way for all who need to “strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees” (Heb. 12:12).

As long as Paul’s body had breath, Christ was living in him (Gal. 2:20). He had seen the risen Lord (1 Cor. 15:8), and was thereby assured both visually and verbally of the veracity of his teaching.



“For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day” (2 Tim. 1:12).

“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (John 20:29).

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#### **Biographical Sketch**

Andy Robison has been the preacher for the Hopewell Church of Christ, Washington, WV, since 2001. Prior to that he worked with the Camden Avenue congregation in Parkersburg, WV, the Oakhurst congregation in Farmington, WV, and the Pennsboro, WV, congregation. He taught Bible and directed choruses at Jackson (TN) Christian School for two years. Andy attended Ohio Valley University and received the B.A. from Harding University. He has done graduate work at Harding University Graduate School

of Religion and returned to Harding University for teaching certification. He has written a number of songs and helped produce several CDs of a cappella singing for the benefit of West Virginia Christian Youth Camp. He and his wife Marsha have two children, Hannah and Andrew.

# *Ananias and Sapphira*

Acts 5:1-11

*Ryan Currey*

I want to begin by thanking the elders of the Hillview Terrace Church of Christ for inviting me to be part of this wonderful lectureship. The topic assigned to me is one that is certainly familiar to all. I have been given the subject of Ananias and



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Sapphira. Our text is one that is rich and has much to offer, Acts 5:1-11.

Before we start in Acts 5 we must first set the context. Acts 4:32-37 lets us know the condition of the church. The church at this point in time was growing not only in number but in spirit. We understand that because of what we read, “Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles’ feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need” (Acts 4:34-35). The first thing we realize is that the Church was helping those who were in need. This shows spiritual growth among the brethren. They had come from being lost in the world of sin to helping those less fortunate. Of course, this would connect with what Paul later said, “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10). Luke continues to then tell us of one specific act done by one man. That man’s name was Barnabas. Barnabas is remembered as being the great encourager. Certainly we can understand why from reading this passage and

many others such as Acts 9:26-28 and 11:22-26. David Roper went on to state, “The church was united, appreciated, and growing. Satan could not tolerate this. He desired to divide it, disgrace it, and decrease it. He had attempted to destroy the church from without-through persecution. Now he would try to destroy it from within-through pretension” (179).

Now that we an understanding of the condition of the church, we come to the text. As Roper commented, Satan was going to do whatever he could to hurt the Church. Unfortunately that is where Ananias and Sapphira now began to come in to the picture.

But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession. And he kept back part of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it, and brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles’ feet. But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself?” “While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to me but to God.” Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. So great fear came upon all those who heard these things. And young men arose and wrapped him up, carried him out, and buried him. Now it was about three hours, later when his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. And Peter answered her, “Tell me whether you sold the land for so much?” She said, “Yes, for so much.” Then Peter said to her, “How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out.” Then immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. And the young men came in and found her dead, and carrying her out, buried her by her husband. So great fear came upon all who heard these things. (Acts 5:1-11)

## **The Story: Getting to Know God**

The biblical lesson of Ananias and Sapphira is one that has been taught in children's Bible classes for years. Every time we had a lesson on lying as a child we always read Acts 5:1-11. However, what exactly is this text telling us? Brother Wayne Jackson said it best:

A certain couple, Ananias and Sapphira, sold a possession. In collusion with one another, a portion of the revenue was turned over to the apostles. The problem with this: the amount was represented as the whole of the sale price (cf. 8). They therefore lied about the transaction. . . . The couple was under no compulsion to contribute the entire amount, but they were obligated to be truthful about the situation. (53)

All certainly understand that Ananias and Sapphira were punished because of their sin against God. We will discuss this more in detail later. However, one of the great lessons we also learn from this story is the attributes of God. One can learn much about our Heavenly Father from this text. One of the first things we notice is His unlimited power. The Bible continually tells about the power of our God in heaven. Jesus said, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26). When talking about the power of God we say He is omnipotent. Roy Lanier Sr. credits Mullins with saying: "By the omnipotence of God we mean his unlimited power to do any and all things consistent with his nature and purpose" ( 118). We see the power of our God in heaven in Acts 5:5, 10. Our God in heaven is so powerful that He struck both Ananias and Sapphira dead. We do worship and serve a powerful God.

However, we also see that our God is omnipresent. Lanier quotes Connor as writing, "The omnipresence of God means that he is everywhere present in space and time. There is no point of space, no moment of time, where God is not present" (128). God was present when they sold the land. God was present when they laid the money down at the apostles feet (Acts 5:2). God was most certainly present when they both breathed their last breath. We get

even a better understanding when reading Psalm 139:7-10. Jeremiah went on to tell us, "'Am I a God near at hand,' says the LORD, 'And not a God afar off? Can anyone hide himself in secret places, So I shall not see Him?' Says the LORD; 'Do I not fill heaven and earth?' Says the LORD" (23:23-24). We must realize that we can never escape the all seeing eye of God.

God also shows us that He is omniscient. The word omniscient means "having infinite knowledge; knowing all things" (Lanier 139). God knew of their plan from the beginning when they sold the land. God knew of their actions when they laid the money down at the apostle's feet. We also realize that God knew what was in their hearts (Acts 5:3-4). This would certainly connect with what God told Jeremiah, "The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; who can know it? I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give to every man according to his ways, According to the fruit of his doings" (Jer. 17:9-10). We will not hide anything from God. Let us never forget that God knows all of our works, and He knows our hearts when doing them.

The final point we will mention from Acts 5 and what we learn about God is a vital point. It teaches us how God views sin. Because God is totally holy (1 Peter 1:16), all that is unholy is abhorrent to Him. God loves all that is good and hates all that is evil (Heb. 1:9). We notice how God viewed the sin of Ananias and Sapphira as well. They were both taken from this life. However, the question must be asked why? The answer is very simple. They both sinned against God. David Roper stated, "Those who think what happened was 'out of character' for God have forgotten what God did to Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10) and Uzzah (2 Sam. 6), not to mention what He later did to Herod (Acts 12)" (184). It is certainly not the case that God acted out of character. No, in fact it is the total opposite. God acted naturally, that is within His nature. We realize that humans have no right to judge how God handled the situation or any other situation for that matter. The Bible tells us, that our God is a just God. He will always do what is right. Abraham said in dealing with God's justice toward the righteous and unrighteous in Sodom, "Far be it from You to do such a thing

as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. 18:25). "God knows how to run His world better than we know how to criticize" (Roper 185).

God's view will never change when it comes to sin. From the very beginning, when the man first sinned (Gen. 3:6), God set the tone for how He viewed sin (3:23). Adam and Eve were driven from the garden. Why were they kicked out? Because they sinned against God. There will always be consequences when sinning against the Father. King Josiah was not the final king of Judah. However, he was the last obedient King of Judah. He understood how God viewed sin. In 2 Kings 22 we read of Hilkiah the high priest finding the book of the law in the house of God (2 Kings 22:8). However, notice what Josiah stated after finding this news out, "Go, inquire of the Lord for me, for the people and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found; for great is the wrath of the Lord that is aroused against us, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us" (2 Kings 22:13). Josiah understood that God was not going to be pleased because the people had been living in sin by not following the law.

### **Satan and the Sins of Ananias and Sapphira**

As Peter spoke to Ananias he said, "Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God" (Acts 5:4). As stated earlier, the basic lesson often applied is the fact that Ananias and Sapphira lied. We understand the seriousness of lying from reading the Scriptures. Paul, when writing to Timothy, wrote, "But we know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully" (1 Tim. 1:8). He then in verses 9 and 10 explains to Timothy who are the ungodly and sinners. Among this list, of course, are the obvious in our minds, the murderers, the fornicators, the kidnappers. However, among that list Paul listed the liars. John wrote similar words through inspiration, "But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death"

(Rev. 21:8). It does not matter what the situation may be, anytime one lies he commits sin. However, Peter noted that not only did Ananias lie, but he lied to the Holy Spirit (v. 3) and furthered that point by saying he lied to God (v. 4).

The early church understood that the Holy Spirit was God in their midst. If the word 'lie' entered Ananias' mind at all, he probably just thought he was lying to the apostles and to the church. The apostles, however, were filled with the spirit of God—and the church was the temple of God. When Ananias lied to these, he lied to God Himself. (Roper 183)

Thus because Ananias lied he was struck dead immediately.

The sin of Sapphira was just as serious with the same result. The reason being it was the same sin (Acts 8:9). Wayne Jackson paints a picture of this event through words:

Some three hours later, Sapphira came in. She probably expected that the congregation would be 'a buzz' with the news of their generosity. One can only wonder about the atmosphere of the assembly as she entered, not knowing what had transpired. . . . Did she ask the whereabouts of her husband? Did she boast of their gift? We do not know, but something elicited a response from the apostle. When Peter questioned her, she repeated the same lie in which her husband had been involved. Peter, with some sort of insight, accused her of conspiring with her husband to put the Lord's spirit to the test—a bad thing to do (Num. 14:20-23; Psa. 95:7-11). The apostle thus announced her impending death; indeed, her 'pall bearers' were waiting at the door at that very moment. She fell down dead immediately, or to express it another way, her 'soul' or 'life' left her. (54)

We understand the seriousness of their sin. However, what caused them to lie? Who was behind this situation? Peter gave us

the answer in verse 3, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie?” We are told that Satan attacked their heart. Dan Winkler stated, “Satan filled, literally ‘crammed to the point of overflowing’ their hearts” (23). David Roper explains, “What Ananias and Sapphira planned to do was basically a good thing. They planned to make a significant contribution to the church. Why they were doing it, however nullified the value of their giving: They did it to receive the praise of men—so they lied to make their gift appear even bigger than it was” (211). Satan did exactly what James warns us of, “But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full grown, brings forth death” (1:24-25). Satan was able to take Ananias and his wife and use their desires against them. What exactly were those desires? Their desires would fall into what John talked about in 1 John 2:15-17:

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. Or all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but if of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

Satan knew their desires and where to attack them. He did so with his pride of life. It is so sad because how often we have seen brothers and sisters in Christ fall to Satan in this same area of sin. J. W. McGarvey explained:

If we attempt to analyze the motive of the guilty pair, we shall find that their act was a compromise between two unholy desires. The desire to have the praise of men, such as had been bestowed upon Barnabas and on some others, prompted the sale and gift, while the love of money, which still held too strong a hold on them, prompted the retention of a part while they were pretending to give all. True

benevolence seems to have had no part in moving them. (83)

What a sad text this truly is. We have the church growing in number and spirit. The apostles were going forth preaching the word of truth. The Church was being benevolent and helping those who were in need. Yet as we have seen so often in the church today, Satan shows his face and destroys God’s children. It is for that reason that we must heed the words of Paul, “Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:11-12). Peter went on to give us a very similar warning, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8).

The blessing as Christians is that God has not left us alone to fight this battle against Satan. Paul told us that we must put on the armor of God to defeat the devil. We must not ever forget that Satan is real and out to destroy us and the church. He wants to destroy this lectureship as we are present on this day. Thomas Holland stated, “If Satan can get us to doubt God’s word, if he can succeed in getting us to question whether or not God means what He has said, then he knows that he is winning the battle for our allegiance to him, and therefore, our rejection of God’s rightful place in our lives” (25). The warnings are clear and we must be on alert. Paul, continues with the great message and gives us hope: “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with temptation will also make a way of escape that you may be able to bear it” (1 Cor. 10:13). There will always be a way of escape and it is up to us to take it. Satan does have schemes and can be sneaky in his ways to make us fall. He obviously was with Ananias and Sapphira. Wayne Jackson explains, “Peter declared that Ananias had fallen under the influence of Satan, and yet, the brother was held responsible for his

own personal conduct” (53). It is not enough to just say, “The devil made me do it.” We are responsible for our own actions. As preachers we must preach this message over and over again so the brethren understand the dangers that are present. Our brethren may not understand the seriousness of Satan or hell. However, the message of Ananias and Sapphira paints a perfect realistic picture.

### **The Response**

The deaths of Ananias and Sapphira, were certainly shocking for the church. The Bible tells us, “So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things” (Acts 5:5, 11). The deaths of Ananias and Sapphira made everyone fear God. God certainly had the people’s attention. However, notice what Peter said, “Great fear came upon all the church. . . .” It is so sad that today in many cases those who are members of the Lord’s church do not fear God. There are those who have made God their buddy or their friend and not their Heavenly Father. He is our God and we are to love, serve, respect, and honor Him. We are to fear Him as the scriptures teach. The first-century church most certainly did and the Church of today should as well.

Men’s conduct is likely to be much more wholesome when they realize the God of the universe sees and hears and knows all that goes on, even their thoughts and motives, and the things they thought no one knew about. If God knew what Ananias and Sapphira secretly planned, then He knows our secrets too; and we’d best be circumspect in our thoughts and behavior. (Reese 208)

Reese is certainly correct in his observation. His thoughts remind us of what Solomon stated, “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil” (Eccl. 12:13-14). We live in time where people are having less and less fear for our God in Heaven. As we pointed out earlier in our lesson, God is very serious about sin. We must never forget that important point.

However, we must also as God’s children be serious about sin. Do you remember what Peter said, “But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, Be holy, for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:15-16). We must strive to be set apart from the world of sin. We are to take no part in it if at all possible. We realize that God the Father is holy. Certainly if God the father is holy that means Christ is holy also. Jesus was separate from sin (Heb. 4:15). John went on to tell us, “He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked” (1 John 2:6). Therefore if I realize how Christ viewed sin, I must also strive to be separate or set apart from sin every day of my life if I am going to walk as He walked.

After God struck Ananias and Sapphira dead, the New Testament church was afraid and understood the seriousness of sin. We need to get back to that point today in the church. We see people turning to liberalism and adding instruments of music into their worship. Women are taking leadership roles in the church. Many in the church today are fellowshiping with those in the denominational world. All of this is sin in the eyes of God. Yet people today do not think anything of it. The question must be asked, why not? The reason is people do not fear God nor do they realize the seriousness of their sin. Sin will cost us our soul in hell. To me that is as serious as it gets. But also, let us look at ourselves for a moment. Roper brought out an excellent point in his book for all of us to think about:

Can any of us who are members of the church look at the graves of Ananias and Sapphira without a shudder? After all, God did not strike them dead for so-called ‘big’ sins. As far as we know, they were not guilty of murder, theft, fornication, drunkenness, or drug abuse. They just told a lie to the church so people would think they were better than they were. Do we ever do that? Have any of us ever told someone, ‘I’ll be praying for you’—not because we plan to pray for that person but because it makes us look more spiritual than we really are? Have any of us ever said to someone who has been in the hospital, ‘Are you already

home? I planned to go see you!’—not because we actually had plans to go see the person, but to make ourselves seem better than we are? (212)

The church today needs to fear God and hate sin. But too often we find those in the church trying to walk the tight rope. The apostle Paul wrote, “Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good” (Rom. 12:9). “To abhor evil is to detest, despise, hate and abominate it. . . . We have to hate what He hates and love what He loves” (Taylor 219). Too many Christians today want to know how far they can go until it is sin. Charles Hodge stated:

To be saved, sinners must see sin as God sees it. Repentance will not come until sinners sense the horror of sin. People who do not fear God do not fear sin. People with a holy view of God sense the enormity of sin. God hates sin, and we must hate it; but, sadly, too many do not hate sins as sin. The more holy we become, the more we hate sin because we understand what it does to our relationship with God. (106)

Hodge is certainly correct and gives us a better understanding of how we should view sin. Let us read a couple of verses to put in light what exactly sin will do to our relationship with our Father in Heaven. The prophet Isaiah said it best: “Behold the Lord’s hand is not shortened, That it cannot save; Nor his ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear” (59:1-2). Peter continued this thought in the New Testament, “For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, And his ears are open to their prayers; But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil” (1 Peter 3:12). We notice that living in a sinful lifestyle separates us from God, so that He will not even hear our prayers. Paul also told us, “For the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). Sin will lead to a spiritual death. It will condemn our soul for eternity. We must learn from the example of Ananias and Sapphira. We must be as

the first-century church and get back to fearing God and keeping His commandments.

### Conclusion

The text we have looked at is vital to us as Christians. As we have noted, there is much to learn in Acts 5:1-11. We as Christians must continue to strive to grow closer to our God. However, the only way we will do that is if we continue to be set apart from sin as God. The only way we will be able to do that, is through prayer and study. In closing, let us always be aware to make sure we are following God’s word but doing it for the right reason. We do not serve God to receive the praise of men as we learn from our text. We serve God because we want to serve Him and watch His kingdom grow. Think about these words:

What if God still treated sin in the church as He did in Acts 5? If that were the case, we would need a morgue in the basement of the church building, we would have to put a mortician on the church staff, and we would need to appoint extra deacons for a burial ministry. (Roper 213)

This is a sad but true statement. We must continually remind our brethren through the preaching of the word that our goal is heaven. It is not the materials of this world, or the praise of men. We should all be thankful to God, for Him giving us Acts 5:1-11. It is now up to us to make sure we apply it.

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### **Biographical Sketch**

Ryan Currey was born in Ripley WV. He grew up in Ravenswood, and graduated from Ravenswood High School in 2001. He is a 2005 graduate of West Virginia School of Preaching. He is married to the former Megan McCracken of Moundsville, WV, and they have a son Carson (3 Years Old) and a daughter Mille Cate (10 months Old). He has done mission work in Costa Rica, and for many years has worked with West Virginia Christian Youth Camp. Ryan was associate minister at Camden Ave Church of Christ in Parkersburg, WV, for 3 years. He and Megan have been working with the Bridgeport Church of Christ for two years.



# *Appointment of the Seven*

Acts 6:1-7

*Rick Tincher*



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Let us begin with a reading of the text:

And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, "It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word." And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them. And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith. (Acts 6:1-7)

Luke's account bears forth the sad reality that growth and trouble so often go hand-in-hand. It has been the personal experience of the author that when things are going well, and spiritual and numerical growth is taking place in a local congregation, struggles tend to follow. Satan will not sit idly by as growth and blessings come upon the people of God. We have been warned: "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8).

Satan strives to turn that which is good into that which is bad, and our various strengths into weaknesses. The Jerusalem church was growing, the Gospel was being preached, and they saw the need to minister to the daily physical needs of their brethren. This practice began in Acts 2, where we find three thousand obeying the Gospel, and the brethren sharing their material blessings with one another. "And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need" (Acts 2:44-45).

It appears that the events of Acts 6:1 occurred due to a snobbish, if not outright prejudicial, attitude by the local Jews toward their foreign brethren. As distribution was being made to meet the physical needs of the church, the Greek-speaking Christians were being overlooked. How sad it is that brethren were neglecting and ignoring the needs of their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

It is also worthy of note that one of the first issues to face the church was an issue in regard to temporal things, not doctrinal. The lesson is clear: Satan will use any distraction, including playing upon prejudices, to halt the work of the Lord.

In this time of trouble, the Grecian Christians brought their grievance to the apostles. It is likely the neglected brethren expected the apostles to drop everything and come to aid, but the apostles did not do so. Instead, the apostles declared the importance of not leaving their work to serve tables. Therefore, seven brethren were to be chosen to take care of this special need. Notice, the apostles did not involve themselves in the choosing of the seven, except to set forth the guidelines for their selection:

“men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom” (Acts 6:3).

The apostles understood that their responsibility was to continue to preach and teach the Gospel. While the needs of the brethren could be met by the labor of others, the duty of the apostles lay in giving themselves “continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4).

It is interesting to note that the words “ministration,” “ministry,” and “serve” found in Acts 6:1-7 all come from the same Greek word, *diakonia*. It is clear, from the three uses of the same word within our text, just how necessary ministry is. Sometimes there are physical needs which must be met, but there is always a need for the “ministry of the word.” Notice, when the problem was solved—when men were appointed to serve the physical needs, while the apostles continued their work in the Word – great gains followed. Acts 6:7 records, “And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.”

### **Ministering to Physical Needs**

Certainly, we see the importance of taking care of physical needs. As James said, “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world” (James 1:27).

In the context of financial support, Paul wrote, “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10).

Paul also praised the generosity of the Corinthian brethren in their support of the Jerusalem brethren by commending them for their “liberal distribution unto them, and unto all men” (2 Cor. 9:13).

Regarding our obligation to the needy, perhaps no Scripture is more clear than 1 John 3:17-18: “But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?”

My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.”

These passages, and a host of others, clearly demonstrate that Christians in the first century offered aid to brethren and non-Christians alike. While they showed concern for the physical needs of those around them, the meeting of these physical needs was not an end unto itself. The church must be benevolent, but not simply a benevolent society. The preaching of the Gospel must never be perverted into anything resembling a mere social gospel.

One of the problems the author has observed in his years of preaching the Gospel, has been the abuse of the generosity of the Lord’s church. On one occasion, while preaching in Hanoverton, OH, a man came by and requested money from the author. After asking the man a few questions, the stranger confessed that he was out of work. The author informed the gentleman of a farm where he might find work immediately. A moment later, as the author turned his head, he found that the man was gone.

A similar story involved a family traveling from Cleveland, OH, to somewhere in Florida. At the time, the author preached for the Laings Church of Christ in Laings, OH. The author could not help but to be filled with wonder why anyone, in his or her right mind, would travel from Cleveland, OH, to Florida using a back road in Monroe County, OH.

Brethren, we must use common sense when considering how to best use the blessings we have been given to aid those in need.

### **Ministry of the Word**

Let preachers preach! This is a powerful, but often missed point in Acts 6:1-7. When preachers are free to preach, we will see God’s word increase and the number of disciples multiply. Preachers should not be celebrities or socialites. A preacher’s goal should never be to simply win friends and influence people but to win people to Christ. The “preaching” styles of the Joel Osteens of the world bear no resemblance to true biblical preaching!

When we consider the prophets of the Old Testament, let us fashion ourselves after their mold. The true prophets of God brought nothing to the people but a simple message of “Thus saith

the Lord.” Preaching the word of God was their work, and it is the same work of any man who preaches today. Paul told Timothy to “preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Tim. 4:2).

The times in which we live indicate the great need to let preachers preach. In the *Gospel Minutes*, Dillard Thurman wrote an article entitled “Give Us Fearless Preachers!” He wrote, “I am confident that no generation preceding this one has had greater need for uncompromising, fearless, and straight-forward preaching and preachers! There’s such moral and spiritual decay in our society that the pressures on any preacher of the gospel is constant and oppressing” (39). If this were true in 1964, when brother Thurman penned these words, certainly it is true today.

Paul’s powerful statement in Romans 1:14-17 sets forth three ideas about preaching. He wrote, “I am debtor,” “I am ready,” and “I am not ashamed of the gospel.” Any preacher of the word should apply these to his ministry.

Congregations must allow their preachers to preach. Many preachers have become weighed down with “serving tables.” Unfortunately, congregations have developed the idea that the local preacher is their possession. When introducing their local minister, some Christians will say, “Meet my preacher.” For many, this is more than just an expression. The preacher is expected to be available for all social events, be the custodian for the meeting house, and a taxi-driver for anyone who calls.

Please do not misunderstand. Ministers should minister, but often these temporal things take so much time that the preacher is distracted from his primary duty, evangelism.

Guy N. Woods made an excellent observation about preaching:

The most potent and powerful influence exercised on mankind through the centuries since our Lord returned to heaven has been the preaching of the primitively pure gospel. This of course, will be denied by some, and scoffed at by others but it is nonetheless true that the gospel of Christ, faithfully proclaimed, has exerted a greater influence in the world than the combined armies of

mankind. Imperial Rome, invincible and unconquerable by force of arms, yielded to the armies of the Lord and her proud legions fell one by one before the onslaught of the soldiers of the cross. (325)

### **Qualifications of Preachers**

When one mentions qualifications in a religious context, most within the body of Christ will first think of those pertaining to elders and deacons, but does the Bible set forth qualifications for preachers? Certainly! We have already noticed a few of them. Consider the following list compiled by Guy N. Woods (305) as to what a preacher must be willing to do.

1. Rebuke false teachers sharply (Titus 1:3).
2. Speak the things that become sound doctrine (Titus 2:1).
3. Teach aged men, young men, aged women, young women (Titus 2:2-5).
4. In all things show oneself a pattern of good works (Titus 2:7).
5. Use such speech that no evil thing can be said of one (Titus 2:8).
6. Teach servants their duty to their masters (Titus 2:9).
7. The foregoing things to speak, exhorting and rebuking with all authority, meanwhile allowing no one to despise him (Titus 2:15).
8. Instruct people to be subject to civil authorities, speak evil of no man, but be gentle, showing meekness toward all (Titus 3:1-2).
9. Avoid foolish questions, contentions and strivings about the law (Titus 3:9).
10. Reject heretics after the first and second admonition (Titus 3:10).
11. Rebuke not elders. Treat elder women as mothers. Younger women as sisters (1 Tim. 5:1-2).

12. Against elders receive not accusations, except before two or three witnesses (1 Tim. 5:19).
13. Those that sin rebuke before all (1 Tim. 5:20).
14. Observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing with partiality (1 Tim. 5:21).
15. Lay hands suddenly on no man.
16. No partaker of other men's sins.
17. Keep oneself pure (1 Tim. 5:22).
18. Follow righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, and meekness (1 Tim. 6:11).
19. Teach the rich their duty (1 Tim. 6:17).
20. Keep that committed to one's trust (1 Tim. 6:15).
21. Avoid profane and vain babbling (1 Tim. 6:20).

The Bible has much to say about who is qualified to be a preacher of the Gospel. The dangers posed by those who are unqualified, but who yet fill the pulpits of our land, are obvious. An unqualified man mounting the pulpit is as dangerous to the church as a loaded gun in the hands of a child.

Acts 6:1-7 is a passage on priorities. Caring for physical needs is important, but preaching the whole counsel of God must take first priority. May God help us to realize the importance of the work of the church. As Paul said, "For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God" (1 Cor. 1:17-18).

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#### Biographical Sketch

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# Cornelius

Acts 10

Glenn Hawkins

I want to express my appreciation to the school and to brother Denver Cooper for the invitation extended to me to speak on this good lectureship. The assigned task for me is Acts 10, the conversion of Cornelius.



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This chapter is one of the benchmark chapters in Acts. Here is the first time the gospel of Christ is preached to a Gentile. According to Acts 9:31, the gospel had spread throughout Jerusalem, Judea, Galilee, and Samaria. But the Lord had said in Matthew 28:18-20 and Mark 16:15-16 that the gospel was to be preached to all nations and every creature. It is now time for the gospel to be preached to a Gentile.

There are several important individuals or characters, both human and divine, that play important roles in this chapter. It is my plan to discuss this chapter in light of the role each human and/or divine person played.

First, there is the man Cornelius. There is no doubt that he was a Gentile. Not only that, he was a centurion, a commander of one hundred men in a band or cohort called the Italian Band. F. F. Bruce states that “centurions were, indeed, the salt of the Roman army” ( 215). Interestingly enough, all centurions mentioned in the New Testament are mentioned in a favorable light. Cornelius is described as a “devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God

always” (Acts 10:2). The word *devout* came from a Greek word meaning pious, reverence well. The phrase “one that feared God” means “to reverence, to venerate, to treat with deference or reverential obedience” (Thayer 656). No doubt Cornelius’ knowledge of God had come from the Jews with whom he had association and to whom he had given much alms. In verse 22 of Acts 10, he is also described as a *just* man. Here was a man who dealt fairly and righteously with his fellow man. He is also described as a man who gave “much alms to the people.” Here we see that Cornelius was a generous and giving man. In Acts 10:22, he is also described as a man “of good report among all the nation of the Jews.” It is certainly unusual, to say the least, that a Gentile soldier should be so highly thought of among the Jews. Finally, he is described as a praying man; that is, he had a habit of daily prayer.

One might be tempted to say at this point, “Did this man really need conversion?” His character puts some Christians to shame. But the fact of the matter is, Cornelius was not a saved man at this time. He still needed to hear the gospel. Perhaps this is what he had been praying about.

The second personage in our narration is the angel of God who appeared to Cornelius while he was praying. The message of the angel was simply, “Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter; he lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side; he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do” (Acts 10:4-6).

Notice, please, that it was not the angel’s responsibility to tell Cornelius what he needed to do to be saved. As Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 4:7, “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.” No angel ever told or will tell an individual what to do to be saved. The role of the angel was limited to putting Cornelius in contact with Peter.

The third personage in this account is God Himself. In Acts 10:9-16, we have the account of Peter praying on the roof top, where he falls into a trance and sees a vision of heaven opening and a vessel

descending like a great sheet knit at the four corners. Inside are all kinds of unclean (to the Jews) animals. The voice bids Peter to “arise, kill and eat.” Peter immediately responds, “Not so, Lord, for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean” (Acts 10:14). God responds, “What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common” (Acts 10:15). This was done three times.

Two things are abundantly clear from this incident. One, all animal creatures are now ceremonially clean, as Jesus taught in Mark 7:19, and as Paul taught in 1 Timothy 4:3-4. Second, and more importantly, Peter was to understand that Gentiles are now proper recipients of the gospel and that the barrier between Jew and Gentile was to be ignored in the matter of salvation.

The fourth person in this account is the apostle Peter. Jesus had already promised Peter that he would have the keys of the kingdom (Matt. 16:19) and Peter had used those keys to open the door of the kingdom to the Jews on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). Now it is time for those keys to be used to allow Gentiles access to the Kingdom. Acts 10:17 says that Peter doubted or was perplexed as to what the vision meant. The word *doubted* denotes consternation to the point of despair (Vine 234). In other words, what did all this mean?

The Spirit then told Peter to go down to the three men who were waiting for him and go with them “doubting nothing, for I have sent them” (Acts 10:20). Then, in what must have been a unique experience for Peter, he invited these three Gentiles into his home to spend the night. The barriers were coming down! God had accomplished His portion in this account. Peter was ready to go to the home of a Gentile to preach the gospel. Some Jewish converts also went with him.

When Peter arrives at the home of Cornelius, he finds not only Cornelius there, but his relatives and friends. The reaction of Cornelius and Peter’s response is most interesting. According to Acts 10:25, Cornelius falls down at Peter’s feet and worships him. Peter reacts immediately by saying: “Stand up; I myself also am a man” (Acts 10:26). While some scholars express doubt that Cornelius really worshipped Peter, Wayne Jackson points out, “if he did not, the apostle reacted rather radically! Larkin points out

that all other uses of the term suggest either true or false worship” (127).

With Peter and his Jewish companions in the house with Cornelius and his family and friends, we are introduced to the fifth personage in our narrative—the Holy Spirit. There are at least two questions that rise concerning the manifestation of the Holy Spirit. Question one is simply, when did the Holy Spirit fall upon Cornelius and his household, and second, for what purpose did the Holy Spirit fall on them?

According to the account in Acts 10:34-44, the Holy Spirit fell on Cornelius “while Peter yet spake these words.” But if you look at Peter’s own account of what happened as he informed the apostles and brethren in Jerusalem, Peter says in Acts 11:15, “And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them, as on us at the beginning.”

Knowing that the Holy Spirit fell on Cornelius and his household accompanied by their being able to speak in tongues, at the beginning of Peter’s sermon, helps us understand the purpose for this astonishing event. We note that Peter’s use of the word *began* in verse 15 is from a Greek word *archo*. Thayer says that this word “indicates that a thing was but just begun when it was interrupted by something else” (78-79).

Why is this important? Because it shows that the purpose for the Holy Spirit falling on Cornelius and his household was not to save them, as some teach. Peter had not spoken the words he was sent to speak and which Cornelius was told Peter would speak—words about the death and resurrection of Christ. Holy Spirit baptism was a promise, not a command. If Cornelius and his household were saved the moment the Holy Spirit fell on them, then they were saved without hearing the gospel, which is God’s power unto salvation (Rom. 1:16-17).

For what purpose was this outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Cornelius and his household? As Jackson wrote, “If God had not given some sign of His disposition toward Gentiles, baptism never would have been administered!” (137). They of the circumcision who had come with Peter “were amazed, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of

the Holy Spirit. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God” (Acts 10:45-46). In Acts 11 as Peter recalls this incident, he says, “And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them, as on us at the beginning” (Acts 11:15). The beginning of what, we may ask. There are at least these possible answers: (1) the beginning of the Christian age, (2) the beginning of the church (kingdom), (3) the inauguration of the new covenant, and (4) the beginning of the fulfillment of Joel 2, which promised the Holy Spirit to all flesh.

It should also be noticed that Peter’s reference to the beginning meant that this phenomena was not a common occurrence on all Christians. While Christians received the ordinary measure of the Holy Spirit at baptism (Acts 2:38), Christians today are not baptized with the Holy Spirit.

Jackson comments:

Here is a critical point. This outpouring of the Spirit with its miraculous manifestations was provided to convince the Jews that God was placing His stamp of approval upon the Gentiles as potential citizens of the kingdom of Christ. There is not one word to suggest that this Holy Spirit baptism had anything to do with the salvation of these Gentiles. (133)

With this in mind, we are now ready to return to the sermon Peter deliver to Cornelius and his household. This sermon is found in Acts 10:34-43. First, in verses 34 and 35, Peter reveals that he had learned a great lesson: God is no respecter of persons. Whether people are Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female, rich or poor, educated or uneducated, black, white, red or yellow, they are to be recipients of the gospel and are to be perceived as potential members of the kingdom of God. As God reminded Samuel in 1 Samuel 16:7, “Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him; the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.” Second, the important thing is that an individual “works righteousness” and “feareth Him.” That person

is acceptable with God. As Jackson says, “The term ‘works’ is a present tense, middle voice form, suggesting that one throws himself energetically into a steadfast mode of obedience” (129). Working righteousness or obedience is absolutely essential in the matter of salvation.

Peter then presents to his audience the message about Jesus. This message had been published throughout all Judea and Galilee after John’s baptism. This message concerned Jesus Christ. A number of things are said concerning Jesus. First, He was anointed by God with the Holy Spirit with power. This happened at His baptism (Matt. 3:16; John 3:34). Second, His mission was about doing good and healing those oppressed of the devil (Acts 10:38). As John expressed it, the miracles of Jesus were to produce faith (John 20:30-31). Third, the apostles were eyewitnesses of all that Jesus did. Their testimony cannot be discounted. Fourth, Jesus was slain by the Jews in Jerusalem by hanging Him on a tree (Acts 10:39). Peter’s saying in verse 36 that “ye yourselves know” indicated that Cornelius was aware of these stupendous events in the life and ministry of Jesus. Fifth, Peter declared that Jesus had been raised from the dead on the third day and appeared unto eyewitnesses, including the apostles themselves. Who better to testify that Jesus was indeed risen than those men who had spent nearly three and a half years with Him! Sixth, the apostles were charged with the responsibility to preach and testify that Jesus is to be the judge of the living and the dead (Acts 10:42). Finally, Peter reminds his listeners that the prophets had borne witness of Jesus. Isaiah, Jeremiah, David, Micah, and other prophets foretold the coming of the Messiah, His life, ministry, death, and resurrection and the establishment of His kingdom. Those who would believe on Jesus would receive the remission of sins (Acts 10:43).

Since the Holy Spirit had fallen upon Cornelius and his household, thus having God’s approval that they should have the gospel preached to them, Peter asked the question, “Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Spirit as well as we?” (Acts 10:47). With no objection forthcoming, the text says, “And he commanded them to

be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed them him to tarry certain days” (Acts 10:48).

In *A New Commentary on Acts*, McGarvey has these insightful words:

Let us now recall the fact that Cornelius had been directed to send for Peter to hear words whereby he and all his house should be saved (xi.14). Peter had come, and spoken these words. He has told the company of Christ, in whom they know believe. He has told them to be baptized, and it has been done. What the pious, prayerful and alms-giving Cornelius had lacked of being a Christian has now been supplied, and nothing has been required of him but to believe in Christ and be baptized. This closes the account of another conversion, and it coincides in essential details with all that have gone before it in this narrative. (217-18)

As Acts 2 stands out for the gospel being preached to the Jews accompanied by the outpouring of the Spirit upon the apostles, so Acts 10 is important to the Gentiles. Jackson wrote:

If God demonstrated His willingness to accept the Gentiles by bestowing upon them the “like gift” of the Spirit, who was he [Peter] to “withstand” the Lord in refusing baptism? The implication was clear. The Jewish brethren must cease at once their contention over what had happened at Caesarea. God had settled the matter. The Gentiles were to be granted status in the church, and that without submitting to elements of the Mosaic law; additionally, there is this thought: If refusing baptism to the Gentiles would have been withstanding God, what is a person doing who refused this divine ordinance for himself? (138).

As we learn in the later chapters in the book of Acts, the gospel, especially carried by Paul and his companions, had a profound impact upon the Gentile world. Truly, Acts 10 is a benchmark chapter in the book of Acts.

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#### **Biographical Sketch**

Glenn E. Hawkins was born in Dexter, MO, October 16, 1943, to Jack and Frona Hawkins (both deceased). His father was a gospel preacher for almost 60 years. Glenn is now in his 36<sup>th</sup> year with the church of Christ in Massillon, OH. He and his wife Hope have two sons, Ken and Adam, and one granddaughter. Glenn holds the B.A. in Bible from Harding University and the M.A. in Apologetics from Harding Graduate School of Religion. He also attended Ohio Valley University. He also presently serves as Board President for Westark Family Services in Massillon, where his wife works part-time.



# *The Momentous Message*

Acts 2:22-36

Gary Workman

What a powerful sermon is contained in the second chapter of Acts! Having refuted the charge of drunkenness in the first part of his address, while at the same time announcing the dawn of the Christian age with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the apostle Peter now turns to the main part of his message (vv. 22-36) with a proclamation of the great fundamental facts of the gospel. Whereas Jesus during his earthly ministry had “charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ” (Matt. 16:20, ESV), and had even refused to give a direct answer to a question about it (Luke 22:67), the time has now come for Peter and the others to publicly declare that “Jesus of Nazareth” (Acts 2:22) is in fact “both Lord and Christ” (v. 36). The thrust of his sermon is not only to proclaim this but to prove it to be true.

Peter’s sermon in Acts 2 is a tremendously interesting message. It is the sort of passage that needs to be studied and restudied in order to really appreciate its magnificence. We begin with the heart of Peter’s sermon, taking a close look at his three-point announcement of the gospel facts and his proof from prophecy. We will then turn our attention to Peter’s explanation of that prophecy, his monumental declaration, and his dramatic conclusion. (Note: unless otherwise indicated, all Bible quotations will be from the NKJV.)

## **The Gospel Proclamation (22-24)**

While the gospel had been preached in its preliminary form since the beginning of Jesus’ ministry (Mark 1:14-15), the Pentecost sermon by Peter was the first time the gospel was “fully preached” (cf. Rom. 15:19)—the first public announcement of the death, burial (by implication) and resurrection of Christ as accomplished events. Such facts are the heart of the gospel (1 Cor. 15:1-4). It was Peter’s initial purpose to set forth three things about Jesus before going on

to His ascension and enthronement.

**Attested by God (22).** At the outset of his sermon, Peter had respectfully called his hearers “Jewish men” (v. 14 literally from the Greek). He now marks a major shift in his message by honorably addressing them as “Israelite men” (again literally from the Greek). He then informs them that the one known to them and posted to the world as the lowly and despised “Jesus of Nazareth” (John 19:19) was “a man approved of God.” While Jesus is elsewhere called *anthropos*, a “man” in the sense of a human being (1 Tim. 2:5), the word here is *aner* – a “man” in contrast to a woman or a boy (cf. John 1:30; Acts 17:31). Though Jesus was truly a man, Peter will show before he is through that Jesus was a man such as the world had never seen and, in fact, much more than a man.

When Peter says that Jesus was “approved of God” (v. 22, KJV, ASV), the Greek word *apodeiknumi* means that God demonstrated Him to be what He claimed to be. He was therefore “attested by God” (NKJV; ESV; BDAG 108). In contrast, notice the Jews’ failure to “prove” (same word) charges against Paul (Acts 25:7). Just as Paul’s preaching was later shown to be true “in demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (1 Cor. 2:4), so Peter says that Jesus was authenticated to the Jews by “miracles, wonders and signs” (v. 22). These three terms are the key New Testament words describing miracles. Our English word *miracle* comes from the Latin *miraculum*, meaning “a wonder” of some kind, but Bible usage is more definitive. Bible miracles are described in three ways: (1) something mighty or powerful, (2) something wonderful or amazing, and (3) something meaningful or significant.

“Miracles” or “mighty works” (ASV) is from the plural of the Greek word *dunamis*, “power” (cf. Acts 6:8; Rom. 15:19; 2 Thess. 2:9). Out of 120 New Testament occurrences of the word, it was translated in the KJV as “miracle(s)” eight times and as “mighty work(s)” twelve times, though its literal meaning is “powers.” “Wonders” (from *teras*) occurs sixteen times in the New Testament. It is found only in the plural and only in conjunction with “signs” if not also “powers.” It is therefore subordinate in

meaning to these other Bible terms. “Signs” is from the Greek *semeion*, which (out of 77 occurrences) the KJV rendered as “miracle(s)” 22 times. The ASV consistently translated the word as “sign(s).” This is the favorite word used by John for the select miracles of Jesus described in his gospel account, though he sometimes used the term “works” (*erga*).

These three key terms reveal true miracles as God's power-works, often performed as signs of authority or promise, and designed to produce wonder or amazement in the minds of the observers or hearers. The ultimate purpose of these miracles was to stimulate faith in the heart leading to acceptance of Jesus as the Son of God (John 20:30-31) as well as acceptance of His revealed word. The full, three-fold description of miracles as given here by Peter is found only two other times in the New Testament (2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:4), where confirmation of the preached word is the point of emphasis.

Though Jesus had been accused of working miracles through the power of Satan (Matt. 12:24), Peter affirms that they were done through the power of God. Jesus Himself had made the point that “the very works” that He did testified that the Father had sent Him (John 5:36; cf. 10:37-38). Refusal to accept the self-evident nature of Jesus’ miracles led some to commit blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:31-32). Peter did not expect his hearers to repeat the same mistake, reminding them that “you yourselves also know” that Jesus’ miracles were genuine.

**Delivered up and killed (23).** Each of the gospel accounts tells of Jesus being delivered up. The Lord Himself had foretold that He would be delivered into the hands of “men” (Mark 9:31), described by an angel after His resurrection as “sinful men” (Luke 24:7). Jesus was first delivered up by Judas to the chief priests and scribes (Mark 10:33), then by Caiaphas to Pilate (Mark 15:1), by Pilate back to the Jews (John 18:36), and finally by the Jews to the Gentiles (Mark 10:33) to be killed. Though many human beings were implicated in this, as well as Satan behind the scenes (Gen. 3:15; Rev. 12:3-4), Peter reveals that it was all according to “the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God” (Acts 2:23).

Peter was simply affirming that God planned ahead of time for Jesus to die for the sins of the world. He was “foreordained” or “foreknown” (ASV) as the sacrificial lamb “before the foundation of the world” (1 Peter 1:20) and was therefore considered *slain* in prospect from the beginning of time (Rev. 13:8, KJV, NKJV, ASV). God decided on this by his “definite plan” and saw it fulfilled from past eternity through his “foreknowledge” (cf. 1 Peter 1:2). It was “determined” or “ordained” (*orismene*) not only that Jesus should die (Luke 22:22) but that He should be resurrected (Rom. 1:4) and eventually become the Judge of the living and the dead (Acts 10:42; 17:31). But while God determined that the death should take place, all who were involved (including Jesus – John 10:1-18) were volunteers in accomplishing it. Knowing the end from the beginning (Isa. 46:10), God revealed these things ahead of time through the scriptures (Luke 24:44-46; Acts 17:2-3; Rom. 1:2).

Finally, “when the fullness of the time had come,” God sent forth His Son as Redeemer (Gal. 4:4-5). Jesus was born to die, as several Messianic prophecies had indicated (e.g. Ps. 22; Isa. 53). The Jews therefore had no excuse not to believe in “all that the prophets have spoken”—namely that the Christ would “suffer and rise again” (Luke 24:25-46, ASV; cf. Acts 26:22-23). The Jews delivered Him up for envy (Matt. 27:18), but in God’s plan He was “delivered up because of our trespasses” (Rom. 4:25). God “delivered Him up for us all” (Rom. 8:32).

Peter does not hesitate to assign guilt for the death of Jesus. “Wicked hands” (KJV) is more accurately “the hand of lawless men” (ASV). Though some think “lawless” could refer to the corrupt Jewish leaders (Bock 121; cf. Acts 4:26-28), the term probably means “men without the law” (ASV, cf. 1 Cor. 9:21; Rom. 2:14), a reference to Gentiles (cf. Mark 10:33; Luke 18:32). These Gentiles would be the Roman soldiers who acted as executioners and possibly even Pilate, who gave the order. It was through the hands of these men that Jesus was “crucified” or (more literally) “fastened” (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich 884) to the cross. But it was the Jews – “you” – on whom Peter pins the ultimate blame for having put Him to death. It was “their will” that

led Jesus to the cross (Luke 23:25). The Jews had said to Pilate, “His blood be on us and on our children” (Matt 27:25). There is no escaping the blame, for Jesus told Pilate, “The one who delivered me to you has the greater sin” (John 19:11), probably a reference to Caiaphas the High Priest.

On a later occasion Peter bluntly said to the Jews, “you denied the Holy and Righteous One . . . and you killed the Author of life” (Acts 3:14-15, ESV). Even though it was done in “ignorance” (Acts 3:17), both the Jewish people and their rulers “crucified the Lord of glory” (1 Cor. 2:8). In later speeches Peter continued to accuse the Jews of the death of Jesus: “whom you murdered by hanging on a tree” (Acts 5:30; cf. 4:10; 7:52; 10:39). And Paul plainly said that “the Jews . . . killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets” (1 Thess. 2:14-15). Therefore, any Papal pardon or other modern attempt to absolve them from guilt is without authority from the Lord and contrary to His word. Whitewashing sin was not the practice of God’s spokesmen back then, nor should it be the practice of God’s preachers today.

**Raised from the dead (24).** God’s authentication of Jesus did not prevent His death, as the Jewish mind would have expected, for that was part of God’s plan. But it did cause God to reverse the sentence after the deed was done. God raised Him up, “having loosed the pains of death.” The “pains” are literally “birth pangs.” The familiar Old Testament references to the “pangs of death” and Sheol (Ps. 18:4, 5; 116:3) give way in the New Testament to the picture of a woman in labor (cf. Matt. 24:8; Mark 13:8; 1 Thess. 5:3). Jesus was delivered from the pains of death because “it was not possible that He should be held by it.” Before He died Jesus had said of His life, “I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again” (John 10:18). He burst the bonds of death, for death could not keep the Creator and Sustainer of life (John 1:3; Col. 1:16-17). Later, Paul would say that “when they had carried out all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead” (Acts 13:29-30, ESV).

Verse 24 is one of the key statements in Peter’s sermon. The Jews knew of the death of Jesus; what they needed now was to

believe in His resurrection. For this reason Peter mentioned the crucifixion in just one short statement, with an added phrase later (v. 36), but he devoted nine verses to the resurrection. The prophetic quotation and explanation that follow were for proof of that essential fact, for without belief that “God raised him from the dead” one cannot be saved (Rom. 10:9 ESV).

### **The Proof from prophecy (25-28)**

**A quotation from David.** In order to prove the resurrection of Christ to his Jewish hearers, who already believed in the Old Testament scriptures, Peter quoted Psalm 16:8-11 from the Septuagint (Gk.) translation. Since the Jews never expected the true Messiah to be murdered, and since they also thought that anyone crucified was under God’s curse (Deut. 21:23), Peter needed to demonstrate the truthfulness of his previous statement that Jesus had been delivered up according to the predetermined plan of God. Peter also needed to prove his assertion that God had raised Jesus from the dead.

We are indebted to Peter and Paul (Acts 13:35-37) for verifying the Hebrew title of Psalm 16—that David was the inspired penman. Peter asserted that the quoted words were said by David “concerning Him” (v. 25)—Jesus. These verses are NOT to be understood as originally spoken by David in reference to himself and only applied by Peter to Jesus as an accommodation, for the thrust of Peter’s argument in explanation of the quotation (vv. 29-32) is that the words *could not* have applied to David. They referred to Jesus and to no one else!

**The intermediate state.** “Hades” (“hell” in KJV) in verse 27 is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew Sheol, which is found in the passage Peter is quoting from Psalm 16. Of the 65 times this word occurs in the Old Testament, the KJV rendered it as “hell” and “grave” 31 times each, plus 3 times as “pit.” This was an unfortunate blunder that is sometimes still repeated as a minority view in reference books (cf. TWOT 2: 892-93). In actuality, Sheol never means anything but the intermediate state of the soul, sometimes called the “underworld” (BDB 982-83). It was never translated in the Septuagint by *mnema* (the Greek word for grave

or tomb—Acts 2:29) but only by Hades and *thanatos* (death), and the Hebrew word for grave (*qeber*) was never translated as Hades. This demonstrates that, as David indicated, only the soul enters Sheol/Hades. The corruption David spoke of is the normal decay of the body. He affirmed that in the case of Jesus both His soul and His undecayed body would return, obviously to be reunited in resurrection.

### **The Explanation of the Prophecy (29-32)**

**David's connection with Christ (29-31).** Peter had already called his audience “Jewish men” and “Israelite men” (literal reading of vv. 14, 22), but he now addresses his hearers with a more familial term—“brethren” (more literally “men-brethren”). They were brethren in the sense of being fellow-members of “the house of Israel” (v. 36). This appellation marks the third stage of Peter's entire sermon. (Even Peter used the familiar three-point outline.) He tells the audience that he “may” or is permitted (*exon*, cf. Matt. 12:4; 2 Cor. 12:4) to speak “freely”—literally “with boldness” (cf. Acts 4:13; 28:31; 2 Cor. 7:4). First-century preachers were not the equivocating, soft-pedaling type so often seen today. When they had reason to fear, they simply prayed for more boldness (Acts 4:29-31; Eph. 6:18-20). So may all of God's spokesmen determine to do.

Peter refers to David as a “patriarch” in the sense of being the founder of a royal dynasty—the first in the Messianic line to accede to the Jewish throne. His lineage was therefore called “the house of David” (Luke 1:27). Abraham too was called a patriarch (Heb. 7:4), as were also the sons of Jacob (Acts 7:8-9). Christ was accordingly described as “the son of David, the son of Abraham” (Matt. 1:1) and “the Lion of the tribe of Judah” (Rev. 5:5).

Peter explained the quoted prophecy by indicating that David could not have been writing about himself in predicting such a resurrection. The most obvious reason was that David “is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day” (Acts 2:29). Josephus indicated that the tombs of David and his family were well known Jerusalem landmarks (Bruce 66; cf. Neh. 3:16) and were, reportedly, the only tombs inside the city walls (Reese 69).

The continuing existence of David's tomb implied that, in contrast to verse 27, David's body *did* see corruption. He therefore must have been referring to another.

A second reason why David was not speaking of himself is that he was a “prophet,” a man gifted with inspiration as Jesus also indicated – “the Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35). It was not just that David prophesied on this one occasion but that he was “being” (existing as) a prophet (Acts 2:30). His statement in Psalm 16, and in other places as well, was predictive prophecy about the Messiah.

A third element of Peter's explanation shows why David in particular was chosen to utter this prophecy: “God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body He would seat one on his throne” (v. 30). The original promise was given through Nathan in 2 Samuel 7:12-16. But Peter was doubtless paraphrasing Psalm 132:11 (cf. Ps. 89:3-4), where mention is made of God's confirming it with an oath. Peter was not referring to David's son Solomon but to David's greater son—Jesus. He was “the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star” (Rev. 22:16).

The three reasons just given show that David “foresaw” into the distant future and therefore knowingly “spoke about the resurrection of the Christ” (v. 31, ESV). It was prophesied that the Messiah would be killed and resurrected (cf. Ps. 22; Isa. 53), though the Jews had failed to grasp this (John 12:34; cf. Matt. 16:21-22) from their study of the Old Testament. They needed to have their minds opened to understand the scriptures (cf. Luke 24:45; Acts 17:2-3). With penetrating logic Peter has now demonstrated that Psalm 16 predicted the resurrection and, by implication, the death of Christ. Later, Paul drew this same conclusion from the same prophecy (Acts 13:35-37).

Peter's explanation of verse 27 utterly destroys the idea of the complete materialism of man. Both David and Peter knew what Jesus affirmed—that people can “kill the body but cannot kill the soul” (Matt. 10:28). Man has a dual nature—the “inward” and the “outward” (2 Cor. 4:16). David's reference to “soul” in verse 27 is changed in Peter's explanation (v. 31) to “he”—the real person, that inward part of man that survives the death of the body.

Peter also explained that the part of the “Holy One” that would normally see corruption or decay in the tomb (v. 29) was specifically “his flesh” (v. 31). But in the case of Jesus, He was to be resurrected before bodily decay was accomplished. His soul returned from Hades and, together with His body, came forth from the tomb. Christ arose in “His glorious body” (Philip. 3:21) never to die again, for “death no longer has dominion over Him” (Rom. 6:9). The Christian counts on the promise of God that He will eventually “raise us up” as well (2 Cor. 4:14) and that Jesus will “transform” our bodies to be conformed to His (Philip. 3:21).

**The apostolic witness (v. 32).** To the proof that Peter has offered from prophecy he now adds another: “This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses,” a reference to Peter and the eleven (v. 14). Matthias was chosen to replace Judas because he had seen the resurrected Christ and could therefore “become a witness” of that fact with the other apostles (Acts 1:22). By special dispensation Paul could later be included in their number. He had miraculously “seen Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor. 9:1) and could therefore say, “we witnessed of God that he raised up Christ” (1 Cor. 15:15, ASV). Scripture foretold the resurrection of Jesus, and the apostles testified from direct observation that it happened.

### **The Enthronement of Jesus (33-35)**

**The ascension of Jesus (33a).** Peter next drew a conclusion from the well-known fact stated in verse 30 about the enthronement of the Messiah and, at the same time, answered a question that would naturally arise from verse 31 about where Jesus is now, since He has been resurrected. Peter affirmed that He has ascended to heaven: “Therefore having been exalted by the right hand of God” (v. 33 literally from the Greek). Some think that the case form of the Greek word *te* should be rendered “to” or “at” the right hand of God (cf. NKJV, NASB, ESV, ASV) instead of the instrumental “by” (as in the KJV and ASV). Peter made a similar statement in a later speech when he said, “Him did God exalt with his right hand to be a Prince and a Savior” (Acts 5:31, ASV), where the same difference occurs in translations. Both statements seem to echo

Psalms 118:16 in the Septuagint: “the right hand of the Lord has exalted me” (cf. Ps. 98:1). If this is the verse behind Peter’s statement, the “by” rendering must be correct.

It is true, though, that “God highly exalted him” (Philip. 2:9, ASV) not only “by” his right hand but also to a position “on” or “at” the right hand of God (Acts 2:34; 7:55, 56; Mark 16:19; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; 1 Peter 3:22). Paul later spoke of “Christ . . . who is even at the right hand of God” (Rom. 8:34). Jesus was once “lifted up” (*hupsóthen*) on the cross (John 3:14; 8:28; 12:32) but now is lifted up or “exalted” (same word) on high.

**The Pentecostal outpouring (33b).** Having proclaimed Jesus’ ascension and glorification, Peter now offers proof from the Pentecostal phenomena: “having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear” (v. 33). Jesus Himself had told the condemning High Priest and Sanhedrin that He would henceforth “sit on the right hand of the power of God” (Luke 22:69). It was from that position of power that Jesus was enabled to fulfill the prophecy of Joel 2:28-29 (quoted by Peter in Acts 2:17-18) and the prediction of baptizing in the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; Acts 1:4-5). To miraculously receive the Holy Spirit and thus be “endued with power from on high” was the promise of the Father that Jesus had said He would send forth (Luke 24:49). And Peter’s audience could now “see and hear” the evidence of it—the phenomena mentioned earlier in the chapter.

**Another prophetic proof (34-35).** In addition to the empirical evidence just mentioned for the glorification of Jesus, Peter now offers proof from another Davidic prophecy (Ps. 110:1), the most frequently quoted Messianic Psalm. David had foretold, “The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at My right hand till I make Your enemies Your footstool” (vv. 34-35). Here again, David could not have referred to himself because he “did not ascend into the heavens” (v. 34), as evidenced by his tomb. Moreover, the statement was addressed to one whom David calls “my Lord.” The original passage has “Jehovah says unto my Lord” (Ps. 110:1). The one referred to as “my Lord” was the Christ, said Jesus (Luke 20:41-

44). The prophetic reference was therefore to Jesus Himself. Later, Psalm 110:1 was quoted again (Heb. 1:13) in a context where Jesus is addressed as “God” (v. 8 from Ps. 45:6).

### **The Concluding Plea (36)**

When Peter reached this point in his sermon, he had proclaimed the life, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, enthronement and current activity of Christ. And he had proved the authenticity of Jesus by evidence from miracles, prophecy, logical reasoning, and apostolic testimony. He is now ready for the grand conclusion: “God has made this Jesus, whom ye crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). He calls on his hearers—“all the house of Israel”—to “know assuredly” (beyond any doubt) that God has “made” or appointed Jesus to a special position. He is the sovereign “Lord” of the universe (cf. Eph. 1:20-23; Philip. 2:9-11) and He is the “Christ”—the predicted Messiah.

Peter is urging his hearers to accept the deity of Jesus. In spite of their crucifying Him, He was “declared to be the Son of God with power . . . by the resurrection from the dead” (Rom. 1:4). Therefore, whenever one confesses “the Lord Jesus” (Rom. 10:9) or confesses Jesus “to be Christ” (John 9:22, ESV), he is acknowledging that divinity (cf. Matt. 16:16; Acts 8:37). Peter’s climactic appeal to his Jewish listeners is much like a later statement when he urged his readers, “Sanctify in your hearts Christ as Lord” (1 Peter 3:15).

Peter closes the sermon proper with another stinging reference to their guilt—“this Jesus, whom you crucified.” No wonder his hearers, many of whom had doubtless clamored for the Lord’s crucifixion, were so pricked in their hearts as to call out, “What shall we do?” When Peter’s audience heard the inspired answer to their plaintive cry, as recorded in verses 38 and 39, about 3000 of them responded that very day (v. 41) and were added to the church by the Lord Jesus Himself (v. 47). With straightforward declarations like these, who could fail to get the message? It is our earnest desire that every gospel preacher today will determine to emulate the powerful preaching of the great apostle Peter in this momentous message.

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# The Gospel in Corinth

Acts 18:1-17

Ben Jones

The Parable of the Sower was the first recorded parable taught by Jesus. Found in all three synoptic Gospels, it teaches lessons fundamental to the interpretation of parables as well as principles of evangelism. When the apostle Paul wrote the letter of First



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Corinthians, he utilized the same agricultural imagery to describe the founding of the church in Corinth:

I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building. (1 Cor. 3:6-9)

In one sense, the establishment of the church in Corinth was no different than the establishment of other churches in Macedonia, Achaia, or Asia Minor. However, due to the providence of God and the common sense of a Roman governor, Paul was able to spend much more time in Corinth relatively unhindered by Jewish opponents. Given the time and opportunity to work, the Gospel had an amazing impact in the city of Corinth. Let us consider the account of Acts 18:1-17 by using Paul's motif of the sower.

## The Field: Corinth

The city of Corinth was a major urban center with thriving industry and trade. Once a prosperous Greek city-state, Old Corinth was destroyed by Rome in 146 BC and its citizens sold as slaves. The site lay in ruins until 46 BC when Julius Caesar had it rebuilt as a Roman colony with the name *Colonia Laus Julia Corinthensis* - the Corinthian colony is Julian praise (Kistemaker 648). The city was strategically located on a plateau above the Isthmus of Corinth, which linked the Peloponnesian peninsula to central Greece. All land routes between the Roman provinces of Macedonia and Achaia passed through Corinth, and the city's twin harbors of Lechaemum and Cenchræa accommodated trade routes to the east and west. Due to the city's resurgence, Augustus Caesar named Corinth the capitol of Achaia in 27 BC.

By the time Paul visited Corinth, the city apparently had a well developed judicial system (1 Cor. 6:1) and city government (cf. Rom. 16:22-23). In fact, multiple archeological discoveries at Corinth support the biblical record. An inscription uncovered at nearby Delphi dates the term of office for the Roman proconsul Gallio at AD 51-52 or 52-53, meaning Paul probably arrived in the city shortly before this time. The *bema*, or judgment seat, where Gallio presided has also been identified among the city ruins. Another inscription on a paving stone reads "*Erastus, pro aedilitate sua pecunia stravit*, or Erastus, in return for the aedileship, laid [the pavement] at his own expense" (Rupprecht 962). Many writers believe this is the same Erastus mentioned as the city treasurer or administrator in Romans 16.

Corinth had a Jewish synagogue, as recorded by Luke, as well as a lintel block discovered with the Greek inscription "synagogue of the Hebrews" (962). However, the city also had a temple to the goddess Aphrodite, and more than a thousand "priestesses" who engaged in prostitution. In the ancient world, the name of Corinth was synonymous with excess and immorality. A "Corinthian girl" indicated a prostitute; to "live as a Corinthian" meant to indulge in vice. Population estimates in Paul's day include as many as 200,000 free men and 500,000 slaves. The city had become a banking center for Greece, and a hub of commerce in the region,

which also provided a constant flow of traders, pilgrims and diplomats. Holladay notes that “Corinth was full of people on the move and people on the make” (9).

Corinth was an ideal field for the gospel. Ships headed west from the city could carry the message of Jesus to Italy, Spain, and North Africa, while travelers sailing east could reach Asia Minor, Phoenicia, and Egypt. Unlike the philosophers and intellectuals in Athens, Corinth’s citizens were artisans, bankers, and traders. They were doers rather than talkers. Presented with the gospel, they were more likely to act on its requirements. Furthermore, a city of excess was likely a city of heartache. Sin hurts people, and the gospel provides the only real cure for their pain. It is not difficult to understand why Paul spent nearly two years preaching and teaching in this prominent city.

### **The Sower: Paul**

While writing to the church at Corinth, Paul recounted his entrance to the great city:

And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. (1 Cor. 2:1-5)

Paul reached Corinth at the end of his second missionary journey. His path through Macedonia had been difficult, spending a night in prison at Philippi, and facing angry mobs at both Thessalonica and Berea. His experience at Athens provided a no less challenging introduction to Achaia. Alone and perhaps discouraged, Paul entered Corinth as a stranger with no friends or money. The Lord soon provided Paul with consolation in the home of Aquila and Priscilla. Having recently arrived in Corinth

themselves, these Jews shared Paul’s trade of tent making. Though educated by Gamaliel, Paul followed the rabbinic practice of learning his father’s trade. Robertson quotes Rabbi Judah as saying “He that teacheth not his son a trade, doth the same as if he taught him to be a thief” (317). Luke does not indicate whether Aquila and Priscilla were already Christians, but it seems a likely possibility. In Ephesus, they were able to give instruction to Apollos, and Paul mentioned the household of Stephanas as the “firstfruits of Achaia” (1 Cor. 16:15). Regardless, these new companions afforded Paul the encouragement to work, making tents during the week and preaching in the synagogue every Sabbath.

Paul’s method in Corinth reveals much about his character. Luke wrote that “He reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and he persuaded Jews and Greeks” (Acts 18:4). Paul’s regular practice was to begin preaching in the synagogue, as he had in both Thessalonica (Acts 17:2) and Athens (Acts 17:17). Here he was likely to find an interested audience of Jews and God-fearing Greeks. In Philippi, where there had been no synagogue, Paul found the meeting place for prayer by the riverside (Acts 16:13). Speaking to such groups, Paul could easily appeal to the Old Testament Scriptures, “explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead” (Acts 17:3). Converts from the synagogue also provided Paul with a springboard to reach the Gentile population of the city at large.

Paul was also accustomed to supporting himself while he preached. While in Corinth, Paul wrote two letters to the church at Thessalonica, and recalled his difficult efforts there. “For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God” (1 Thess. 2:9). And again “nor did we eat anyone’s bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you” (2 Thess. 3:8). Paul engaged in strenuous labor, perhaps starting the day before sunrise and continuing long after sundown. As a preacher and an apostle, Paul believed he had the right to be supported



financially for his work (1 Cor. 9:1-10). Yet he willingly gave up that right for the sake of those he hoped to save (1 Cor. 9:12).

When Silas and Timothy finally caught up to Paul in Corinth, their presence seemed to cause a change in his preaching. Luke wrote that “Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ” (Acts 18:5). Perhaps until now Paul had only been preaching about the Messiah of prophecy and had not identified Him as Jesus of Nazareth. A more likely cause may be related to a textual question in verse 5. The King James Version reads “Paul was pressed in the *spirit*” (*pnuemati*), but the American Standard Version reads “Paul was constrained by the *word*” (*logōi*). Robertson judges the latter reading to be correct, and explains the phrase to mean “Paul held himself together or completely to the preaching instead of just on Sabbaths in the synagogue” (317). It is possible that Silas and Timothy brought Paul support from other congregations, allowing him the opportunity to focus his full attention on preaching. This is likely what Paul meant when he wrote “I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to minister to you. And when I was present with you, and in need, I was a burden to no one, for what I lacked the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied” (2 Cor. 11:8-9).

The Jews quickly took notice of Paul’s message and began to oppose him in the synagogue. Paul’s response was twofold. First, he declared his responsibility toward them fulfilled. Shaking one’s garments was akin to shaking the dust off one’s shoes, as Jesus had instructed (Mark 6:11) and Paul and Barnabas had done in Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:51). In Ezekiel, the watchman who blew the trumpet was guiltless of the blood of those who failed to prepare for battle (Ezek. 33:4). And so, Paul declared “Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean” (Acts 18:6). Next, Paul found a new location for his preaching, and turned his attention to the Gentiles in Corinth. While Paul’s actions were bold, he undoubtedly feared another angry mob might force him to exit the city. The Lord spoke to Paul in a vision and said “Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent” (Acts 18:9). Literally, the force of the language is “stop being afraid, but go on speaking and do not become silent” (Robertson 318). Paul continued preaching in Corinth for a year

and six months, and the Lord accomplished much good through his message. During Paul’s first Roman imprisonment, he urged the Ephesians to pray “that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel” (Eph. 6:19). Perhaps in this prayer request Paul recollected his time in Corinth when the Lord had charged him to keep speaking despite his fear.

The apostle Paul was a sower worth emulating. He chose a starting point where he was likely to be the most effective with his preaching. He was tirelessly dedicated to his message, working to support himself through difficult circumstances. When he did receive support, he maximized his opportunities to preach. When men opposed his teaching, he moved on to new prospects. Most importantly, he just kept preaching and left the results to God (1 Cor 1:17).

### **The Seed: The Gospel**

Paul’s message in Corinth was the same message he delivered to all the churches.

Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you - unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. (1 Cor. 15:1-5)

These central facts provided the basis for all of Paul’s preaching. First, he explained Old Testament prophecies concerning the coming Christ. Second, he demonstrated how Jesus of Nazareth had fulfilled those prophecies in His life, death, and burial and how God had given further confirmation of Christ’s identity through the resurrection. Finally, he offered his own eyewitness testimony of the risen Christ. Simple and yet profound, the death, burial, and

resurrection of Jesus formed the core of a message that would change the world.

To begin with, the Gospel was based on facts that could either be confirmed or denied. Evidence was available, and inquiring students could reach a valid conclusion. When Paul preached the Gospel in Berea, his listeners “searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11). Some five hundred eyewitnesses could give testimony to the risen Savior. If the resurrection was a hoax, evidence would also have been present to disprove such an outlandish claim. No such evidence has ever successfully been presented. Furthermore, the facts of the Gospel have consequences. They are not just random propositions one can simply discard or harmonize with opposing beliefs. If Christ has been raised from the dead, then life after this world must exist. The Greeks in Athens mocked such a possibility (Acts 17:32) and the new converts in Corinth struggled with its implications (1 Cor. 15:12), but Paul demonstrated that every part of the Christian faith was linked to the resurrection of Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 15:13-19). Finally, the Gospel message is backed by the power of God. Paul wrote “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek” (Rom. 1:16) and again “for the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor. 1:18). The Gospel was not just a story of Paul’s devising. It was delivered to him from God. It demonstrates the faithfulness of God’s promises (Gal 3:29) and the exceeding greatness of God’s power (Eph 1:19).

Therefore, the facts of the Gospel demand a decision. One can believe the facts and respond with obedience, or one can reject the facts and respond with disobedience. Concerning this choice, Paul wrote the following:

For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called,

both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. (1 Cor. 1:22-24)

Upon hearing Paul’s testimony that Jesus was the Christ, some Jews in Corinth opposed him and blasphemed. The facts were plain enough, but to accept them required more than these Jews were willing to give. When the Roman proconsul Gallio arrived in Corinth, he had no interest in hearing the charges brought against Paul by the Jews, saying “if it is a question of words and names and your own law, look to it yourselves; for I do not want to be a judge of such matters” (Acts 18:15). His statement, and the way he subsequently turned a blind eye to the beating of Sosthenes, seems to indicate that he was truly confused by the nature of the charges, though he understood who was truly at fault. However, when Paul later appeared before Felix, that governor understood the Gospel all too well, and was terrified as a result (Acts 24:25). To the unrepentant Jews the Gospel was a stumbling block; to the Greeks it was foolishness. Yet the trouble lay not in their understanding of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, but in their unwillingness to accept the consequences of those facts.

For those with honest and open hearts, the Gospel produced a different response. Luke wrote “then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized” (Acts 18:8). These people had received the “implanted word” which was able to save their souls (James 1:21). The Corinthian church would later struggle with divisions between Jew and Gentile, rich and poor, and varieties of spiritual gifts, but they were first united in one body through a common response of faith and obedience to the Word of God.

### **The Increase: The Church at Corinth**

When Paul penned the letter of First Corinthians, he addressed it to “the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints” (1 Cor. 1:2). The congregation at Corinth was by no means a perfect church, but it unquestionably belonged to God. In the eyes of men, a city whose

very name suggested immorality might be a poor choice for an evangelistic campaign. But God, who knows the hearts of men, charged Paul to preach the Gospel with the promise that “I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city” (Acts 18:10). Robertson points out that this last phrase expresses the dative of personal interest, meaning “there is to Me much people” (317). Concerning this statement, McGarvey writes “He knew that these people would yet believe and obey the gospel, and he could, therefore, with all propriety of speech, call them his by anticipation” (138). One is reminded of Paul’s own conversion, when the Lord reassured fearful Ananias with the words “Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15). Both Saul and the Corinthians were called by the Gospel, and sanctified by baptism into Christ Jesus.

The early church at Corinth included Paul, Aquila, Priscilla, Timothy, Silas, and the household of Crispus, ruler of the synagogue. First Corinthians also mentions Gaius, who may be the same person who opened his home to Paul after the Jews cast him out of the synagogue. This man is identified by Luke as Justus, or Titius Justus, and his full Roman name may have been Gaius Titius Justus (Kistemaker 653). Another familiar name that appears in First Corinthians is Sosthenes, who Paul calls “our brother” (1 Cor. 1:1). Many believe this man is the same Sosthenes who received the beating meant for Paul in Corinth. If that is the case, then Paul’s preaching converted two synagogue rulers, the latter once a strong opponent of Christianity. Whether this was the same Sosthenes or not, the church at Corinth was full of men who had once lived in opposition to the truth. Paul wrote the following in First Corinthians:

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you

were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Cor. 6:9-11)

Paul’s first converts were Jews and God-fearing Gentiles, but his message soon spread to the general populace of Corinth. Given the city’s reputation, some of its citizens could have been guilty of all of these sins on the same day. But the Gospel led these people to repentance, and having been baptized, the Lord added them to His church. Paul would later write to this church “for by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:13). The power of God is seen in the amazing transformation of obstinate Jews and immoral Greeks into saints. The wisdom of God is seen in the means of the transformation. The Gospel cuts across lines of race, gender, prosperity, and background and unites men in the fellowship of the body of Jesus Christ. God alone can see the true potential of men, and He guides the increase of the kingdom in unlikely but wonderful ways.

The church in Corinth is a testament to the influence of the Gospel in any place, at any time. The power is still in the Word of God; the increase still in the hands of God. Like the apostle Paul, we need to just keep preaching. We cannot choose who will obey the Gospel, but we can choose who will hear the Gospel. Let us continue to plant and water and allow God to give the increase.

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### **Biographical Sketch**

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# The Ascension of Christ in Acts

Terry Jones

“The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool’” (Ps. 110:1). Ten centuries prior to the birth of Christ, David prophesied of His ascension and enthronement at the right hand of the Father. Because the



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resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the foundation truth of the gospel, the ascension has been overshadowed. However, it must be considered equally significant (Jackson, “Ascension”).

Although the gospel writers provide a thorough account of the earthly life and ministry of Jesus, they gave little attention to His ascension. Only Mark (16:19-20) and Luke (24:50-53) make mention of it, and then, only very briefly. The fullest account was given by Luke in Acts chapter one. For this study, we will focus our attention on verses nine through eleven.

## The Ascension of Jesus (Acts 1:9)

Verse twelve reveals that the place from which Jesus ascended back to heaven was the mount called Olivet. He could have ascended from the valley just as easily, but Olivet was the chosen place. This was a place of prominence in the biblical story. “The Mount of Olives lies to the east of Jerusalem across the Kedron Valley. It rises 2,684 feet in elevation (about 200 feet above Jerusalem), and affords a magnificent view of the holy city. From somewhere on this height, Jesus ascended back into heaven” (Jackson, *Acts* 10-11).

The Mount of Olives is a limestone ridge, a little more than a mile in length. There are seven peaks in this ridge that runs the whole length of the city of Jerusalem. On the north the ridge bends around to the west and thus encloses the city on the north and east. David walked down from the city of Jerusalem into the Kidron valley and up the slopes of the Mount of Olives in his flight from Absalom (2 Sam. 15:30). Solomon built high places on the Mount of Olives (2 Kings 23:13). Ezekiel saw the Mount of Olives in a vision . . . It was on the road up from this valley that our Lord rode in His triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Mark 11:8). It was on this Mount that Jesus sat when He viewed the city of Jerusalem and wept because of their unbelief (Mark 13:1; Mat. 23:37). The Garden of Gethsemane is in the valley at the foot of the Mount of Olives (John 18:1; Mat. 26:30, 36). Our Lord last appeared on earth on the fortieth day after His resurrection on the Mount of Olives. (DeWelt 24)

Luke records that this event happened when *Jesus was talking*. These are the final moments of Jesus’ time upon Earth with His disciples. This would have been a very precious and touching time. We are not told all that Jesus said to them, but we do know that “He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father” (Acts 1:4). It must have been disappointing to Jesus that the disciples still had an earthly concept of the kingdom. “Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, ‘Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’” (Acts 1:6). The Lord, however, did not condemn the disciples for the misconception, but reminded them that the “time” of the coming of the kingdom was not for them to know, and that the more important thing was their being empowered by the Holy Spirit to take the gospel to the whole world (Acts 1:7-8).

Secondly, we are told that *Jesus was taken up*. Luke’s gospel provides some valuable details at this point. “And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them.

Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven” (Luke 24:50-51). The fact that “He was taken” indicates that the ascension occurred by the power of the Father. Kistemaker states, “Note that the passive construction of the verb *he was taken up* implies that God the Father is the agent who took Jesus back to heaven (see v. 2)” (56).

Thirdly, we are told that *Jesus was taken by a cloud*. This detail is reminiscent of the Mount of Transfiguration when, “a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!’” (Matt. 17:5)! Jesus was received into the cloud and the disciples saw Him no more.

### **The Astonishment of the Disciples (Acts 1:10)**

In the wake of Jesus’ ascension we see *the apostles staring*. It is certainly not difficult to imagine how that the apostles would have been awe struck and speechless as they gazed toward Heaven. They had seen Jesus defy gravity by walking on water, and now He has done it again by being lifted into Heaven. The ascension was the culmination of Jesus’ sojourn on Earth. He had finished the work He came to do and now was returning home to glory. Paul said, “He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things” (Eph. 4:10). To Timothy he wrote, “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory” (1 Tim. 3:16).

We also find here *the angels standing*. This verse calls attention to two men in white apparel. They appear to be very clearly angels sent by God. “It is obvious that Luke intends for us to understand that these were not ordinary men, but heavenly messengers or angels in the form of men. Their sudden appearance, their white apparel and their message to the apostles all combine to so indicate” (McClish 52). It should be noted that these men were not floating in the air with Jesus. Rather, they were standing with the apostles.

### **The Admonition of the Angels (Acts 1:11)**

When the angels spoke, they called the apostles “men of Galilee” because that was the home of all eleven of them. Ten days later the multitude in Jerusalem marveled that these men spoke in various languages, though they were all Galileans (Acts 2:6-8). The angels said, “Why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.” Perhaps their intent was to divert the apostles from their sky-gazing to the work the Lord left them to do. Jesus had said to them in verse eight, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

These messengers from God delivered a promise that Jesus would return. Jesus, Himself, had made them that same promise.

Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. (John 14:1-3)

The angelic promise of the return of Jesus is noteworthy: Jesus “shall so come in like manner as ye beheld him going into heaven.” This includes the following: (1) As Jesus departed visibly, so shall he return visibly (Rev. 1:7). (2) As he disappeared into a cloud, so shall he reappear with the clouds (Rev. 1:7; 1 Thess. 4:16-17). (3) Since his ascension was accompanied by angels, likewise the Lord’s return shall be (Mat. 25:31; 1 Thess. 4:16; 2 Thess. 1:7). (4) Since Christ departed in bodily form, so shall he appear. The two angels made the same connection between the ascension and the return of Christ that the Lord himself made in John 14:3. (McClish 53)

## The Abiding Significance

It was important that there be eye-witnesses to the ascension of Christ. If Jesus just disappeared, man would forever since be left wondering what happened to Him. However, we now have the assurance that He is in heaven just as the angel affirmed. Wayne Jackson (“Ascension”) has compiled a list of significant doctrinal points connected with the ascension of Christ that are very thought-provoking:

1. The ascension of the Savior is an integral part of the proposition that Christ is the “Lord,” who has the right to exercise “all authority” (Matthew 28:18; Ephesians 1:20-23). On Pentecost, after arguing for the resurrection and ascension, Peter contended: “Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly, that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified” (Acts 2:36). Especially note the “therefore” connective.
2. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost was implemented by the ascended Christ (Matthew 3:11; Acts 1:5; 2:33). This supernatural event authenticated the fact that the circumstances of that day, resulting in the establishment of the church of Christ, were divinely orchestrated. The Christian regime is from God, not man.
3. The ascended Christ empowered certain early disciples with miraculous gifts, by which the Mind of God was revealed to humanity and subsequently preserved in a body of sacred literature (see Ephesians 4:10ff). The present availability of this ancient record allows the modern student to “put to the test” the credibility of the primitive documents, find them to be trustworthy, and happily anchor his hope of heaven therein.

4. The ascension of Christ into heaven clearly reveals that, contrary to Jewish expectations (and even that of the misguided disciples), the Lord’s mission to this planet was not to overthrow Rome, and establish an earthly, political administration reminiscent of David’s (cf. John 6:15; 18:36; Acts 1:6). In the words of a poet: They were looking for a king, To slay their foes, And lift them high. Thou camest a little baby thing, That made a woman cry. Modern millennialists would do well to learn this important truth.
5. The ascension of Christ demonstrated the *manner* of Christ’s *final return*. The disciples “beheld” Jesus vanishing into the clouds (Acts 1:11b). The verb *theaomai* is employed 24 times in the New Testament, and never is it used in a *figurative* sense. They literally saw Christ ascend. Additionally, Luke emphasizes that “in like manner,” i.e., in a *visible* fashion, the Lord will return. The combination of these terms clearly indicates that the Savior’s second coming will be a *literal* coming. This eliminates the spurious notion that Christ’s *representative* “coming” (via the Roman armies — Matthew 22:7), in the overthrow of Jerusalem (Matthew 24:30), was his *second* coming (cf. Heb. 9:28). And yet the advocates of “realized eschatology” contend otherwise. Luke’s language also eliminates the theory that the Lord’s next “coming” will be an *invisible* “rapture-coming,” as dispensationalists project.
6. The ascension of Jesus provides us with a supreme confidence that we have a heavenly High Priest who, having been “crowned with glory and honor” (Hebrews 1:13; 2:7,9), ever lives to make intercession for us (Hebrews 7:25; cf. 1 John 2:1-2).

This concept of a *heavenly* high priest is a prevailing theme in the book of Hebrews.

7. The ascension argues for the proposition that our eternal destiny will not be upon a “glorified earth,” as many affirm. Jesus entered heaven as a “forerunner” (one who goes in advance of others) for us (Hebrews 7:20). By his return to heaven, Christ “dedicated for us” a new and living way that is not earthly in nature (Hebrews 10:20). Earth is not heaven (Matthew 6:19-20).
8. The ascension of Christ underscores the fact that Christians are charged with the responsibility of implementing his will on earth, as he reigns from heaven. The Teacher’s parting words commissioned his people to make disciples of every creature among the nations throughout the earth (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:47).

The ascension of Christ was a supremely significant event. In Acts 7 we find the heart-wrenching account of Stephen who was stoned to death in Jerusalem for preaching Christ. “But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, ‘Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!’ . . . And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit’” (Acts 7:55-59). Peter assures us that Christ “has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him” (1 Peter 3:23).

### Conclusion

It must be remembered that just as surely as Jesus ascended into Heaven, He will one day return. Peter assures us that Jesus will keep His promise. “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not

willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

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### Biographical Sketch

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# Paul's Controversies

Aaron Burch

At the end of Acts 7, Luke introduces the reader to the zealous, young Pharisee, Saul (vv. 57-59; 8:1), a native of Tarsus of Cilicia and a student of Gamaliel, (22:3), and, even at this first introduction, his life is characterized by controversy. At that time,



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he was vehemently persecuting the church (cf. 8:1-4; Gal. 1:13-14; Philip. 3:6), but shortly thereafter his life would drastically change. Jesus appeared to him, Ananias preached to him, the message convicted him—he became a Christian! As a Christian, Paul would endure even more controversy from both Jews and Gentiles. Thus, Paul's Christian life began after controversy with Jesus and continued with controversies from both the Jews and the Gentiles.

## Paul's Controversy with Jesus

In chapters 9, 22, and 26 of Acts, Luke records Paul's controversy with Jesus, which occurred as Paul was traveling to Damascus in order to seize Christians and bring them to Jerusalem for punishment (9:1-2). Before Paul arrived at Damascus, however, Jesus appeared to him in a "great light" and confronted him (22:6).

Two main purposes are given for Jesus' controversy with Paul. First, Paul was persecuting the church. In Acts 9:1, Luke records, "Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to

Jerusalem" (cf. Acts 22:4-5; 26:9-11; Note: all Scripture citations in this article are from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted). In verses 4-5 of the same chapter, Jesus correlates Paul's persecution of the church to persecution of Himself. In fact, Jesus said, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" and "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" (cf. Acts 22:7-8; 26:14-15). Paul's persecution of the church was a personal matter to Jesus, a matter for which Jesus confronted him.

Second, Paul's controversy with Jesus also occurred because Paul was a "chosen vessel" (9:15). Jesus had a particular purpose for Paul. After commanding him to "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do" (9:6; cf. Acts 22:10), those who were with Paul "led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus" where he fasted and prayed for three days (9:8-9, 11; cf. Acts 22:11). Jesus then appeared to "a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias . . . in a vision" (9:10) and sent him to Paul (9:10-13). At first Ananias questioned going to Paul, but Jesus replied by revealing part of His purpose for Paul: "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake" (9:15-16). "[F]or" in verse 15 introduces the reason Jesus sent Ananias to Paul. Jesus gave three reasons: Paul was His chosen vessel, Paul was to bear His name, and Paul was to suffer for His name's sake.

Later, in Acts 22:14, during Paul's speech to a mob in Jerusalem and after he had recounted for them the events that occurred on the road to Damascus, Paul quoted Ananias: "The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth." The next verse states the reason for God's choosing and Jesus' appearing to Paul: "For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard" (v. 15).

Paul gave an even more detailed account in Acts 26:16-18, when he stood before King Agrippa and again recounted the events of Jesus' appearance on the Damascus road. Jesus, Paul said, appeared "to make" him "a minister and a witness" (v. 16). *Minister (uperetes)* is defined as "assistant to another as the

instrument of his will” (Rengstorf 530) or “one who functions as a helper, freq[ue]ntly in a subordinate capacity” (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich 1035). Paul would function as “a minister and a witness” in two ways. First, he would be a minister and witness “of the things [he had] seen” (v. 16). To the Jews in Acts 22:6-11 and here before King Agrippa in Acts 26:12-23, Paul indeed did declare Who he had seen, Jesus. Second, he would be a minister and witness “of the things which [Jesus would] reveal to [him]” (v. 16). As Jackson points out, Paul “would witness to others regarding both this experience, and certain revelations from Christ which were yet in the future (18:9; 22:18, 21; 23:11; 2 Cor. 12:2 [cf. also Gal. 1:16ff; 1 Cor. 2:10-13; 11:23, etc.]” (330). Jesus also appeared, Paul said, to “send” him to the Gentiles (v. 17), “to open their eyes” (v. 18), and “to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance” (v. 18). Thus, Jesus confronted Paul to make him his “chosen vessel” to preach the gospel, especially to the Gentiles.

After Jesus’ appearance to Paul, the confrontation resulted in two things. First, Paul, the vehement, zealous persecutor of the church, became a Christian. It is important to note when Paul became a Christian. His conversion did not occur when Jesus appeared to him (9:3-6), nor when he fasted and prayed in Damascus (9:9, 11), nor when he had the vision of Ananias coming to him (9:12), nor when Ananias laid his hands on him and he regained his sight (9:17-18a), for after all those events Paul was still in his sins (22:16). Not until Paul submitted to baptism was he forgiven. Second, Paul began preaching the gospel just as Jesus had chosen him to do. In fact, in Damascus he immediately began to preach Jesus as “the Son of God” (9:20) and as the “Christ” (9:22). The persecutor had become the preacher, but, would become the persecuted (9:23).

What application can we learn from Paul’s controversy with Jesus? First, in a sense, everyone will have a controversy with Jesus. Although no one today is confronted in the same manner as Paul, we all are confronted. We are confronted by Jesus through the preaching of the gospel. We are confronted by Jesus through

the reading of God’s word. But, how will we respond? Will we repent? Will we follow Jesus? Will we obey Him? Moreover, everyone will ultimately be confronted when we stand before the great judge on the last day (Matt. 25:31ff; 2 Cor. 5:10). Where will we stand? Will we humbly bow before Him in obedience prior to His coming or will we be forced to our knees when He returns (cf. Philip. 2:9-11)? Second, Jesus challenges us, like Paul, to spread the gospel to the lost. He wants us to take the gospel to “all nations” (Matt. 28:19), because He still wants their eyes opened, He still wants them “to turn . . . from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God,” He still wants their sins forgiven, He still wants them to receive “an inheritance among those who are sanctified” (Acts 26:18). But, Jesus is still the only way (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). Will we accept His challenge?

### **Paul’s Controversies with Jews**

After Paul was converted to Christ and began to preach the gospel, his controversies with the Jews started. In fact, throughout Acts, Paul is plagued by the unbelieving Jews. While he was in Damascus, “the Jews plotted to kill him” (9:23). At Jerusalem, the Hellenistic Jews “attempted to kill him” (9:30). On the island of Paphos, Elymas the Jewish sorcerer “withstood” Paul and Barnabas (13:8). In Antioch of Pisidia, again the Jews “opposed the things spoken by Paul” (13:45) and “stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region” (13:50). At Iconium, “the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren” (14:2) and then sought unsuccessfully “to abuse and stone” Paul (14:5). At Lystra, the Jews from Antioch and Iconium “persuaded the multitudes” and “stoned Paul” (14:19). Likewise, in Thessalonica, because the Jews were “envious,” they stirred up the crowds and effectively drove Paul out of town (17:5, 10). Not being satisfied with that, the same Jews chased Paul out of Berea as well (17:13-14). At Corinth, the Jews “opposed” Paul (18:6) and eventually brought him before Gallio the proconsul of Achaia (18:12). In Greece, “the Jews plotted against him” (20:3). Finally, the Jews

from Asia who were at the temple in Jerusalem seized Paul and tried to kill him (21:27ff), with the result that Paul was taken into Roman custody for the remainder of Luke's record in Acts.

Of the aforementioned controversies, two seem worthy of specific discussion. First is Paul's confrontation with the Jews in Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:13-51). After coming to that city, Paul and Barnabas entered the Jewish synagogue and were asked to speak to the assembly (13:14-15). Paul spoke and began his sermon by surveying God's interaction with the nation of Israel from the time of the patriarchs to the reign of David (13:16-22). From the shepherd king, Paul transitioned to Jesus of Nazareth, who, Paul said, was the promised seed of David God had sent to save Israel, but whom also the Jews in Jerusalem had put to death (13:23-29). Despite the Jewish death sentence, God raised Jesus from the dead as the prophets had foretold in Psalm 2:7, Psalm 16:10, and Isaiah 55:3 (13:30-37). Paul concluded by telling the people that forgiveness of sins was through Jesus, not the Law of Moses, and by warning them about unbelief, quoting from Habakkuk 1:5 (13:38-41). Paul's sermon resulted in many Jewish followers and in the Gentiles asking Paul to preach to them "the next Sabbath" (13:42-43). When the day arrived, Luke records that "almost the whole city came to hear the word of God" (13:44). At that point, Paul's controversy with the Jews in Antioch of Pisidia began.

The reason for the controversy was one simple thing – envy! The Jews opposed Paul because, "when they saw the multitudes," Luke records, "they were filled with envy" (13:45). Roper suggests that the Jews' envy came about because they "were evangelistic (Mt. 23:15), but they had never been able to get the whole city excited about hearing the law of Moses" (496). Thus, envy and jealousy drove the Jews to oppose Paul.

The controversy resulted in three things. First, Paul "turn[ed] to the Gentiles," quoting from Isaiah 49:6 (13:47), many of the Gentiles obeyed the gospel (13:48), and "the word of the Lord . . . spread throughout all the region" (13:49). Second, Paul's turning to the Gentiles angered the Jews, so that they started a "persecution" against Paul and Barnabas and had them "expelled . . .

. from their region" (13:50). Third, Paul and Barnabas left Antioch of Pisidia and "shook off the dust from their feet against them, and came to Iconium" (13:51; cf. Matt. 10:14). Roper notes that, by this action, "Paul and Barnabas were saying to the Jews of Antioch that as far as God was concerned, they were now 'the heathen'" (499).

The second of Paul's controversies with Jews worthy of discussion is his controversy at Jerusalem (21:27ff). Paul came to Jerusalem and was received by the Christian brethren; however, some of them encouraged him to be purified along with four other men so that the Jews would know that he "walk[ed] orderly" and observed "the law" (21:17-25). After being purified, Paul went to the temple and was seen by certain Jews from Asia, who seized him, stirred up all of Jerusalem, and sought to kill him (21:26-30). The Roman commander, Claudius Lysias (cf. Acts 23:26), stopped the Jews, and Paul asked to speak to the people (21:31-40). In his speech, Paul reviewed his Jewish upbringing, his persecution of the church, the events which occurred on the road to and in Damascus, and his vision in the temple in Jerusalem (22:3-21). In that vision, the Lord had sent him, Paul said, to preach to the Gentiles, which enraged his Jewish listeners (22:22).

The main reason for this controversy is found in Acts 21:28. There Luke quotes the Jews as having said, "Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches all *men* everywhere against the people, the law, and this place; and furthermore he also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place." In verse 29, Luke adds the explanatory note: "For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple." Thus, this particular controversy with the Jews arose over Paul's teaching and companions. Furthermore, the controversy increased because of Paul's commission from Jesus to preach to the Gentiles (22:21-22).

The controversy ultimately resulted in Paul's imprisonment. From this point in Acts until the end of the book, Paul remains in prison, first in Jerusalem (22:24-23:30), then Caesarea (23:31-26:32), and then Rome (28:16-30). However, because of Paul's appeal to Caesar (cf. 25:10-12, 21, 25; 28:16) and his voyage to

Rome, the controversy also resulted in the spread of the gospel. Paul had opportunity to preach to Felix and Drusilla (24:10-21, 24-26), King Agrippa, Festus, and Bernice (26:1-29), the people of Malta (28:1-10), and the Jews and “all who came to him” in Rome (28:23-30).

From Paul’s controversies with the Jews, a number of lessons can be learned. First, we should strive to present the gospel to all those who might accept it (cf. Matt. 7:6). Paul presented the gospel to the Jews, but, once they rejected it, he went to the Gentiles. We, too, must give everyone the opportunity to accept the gospel and always look for more open hearts. Second, suffering and persecution for the gospel’s sake may result in the spread of the gospel. As Christians we should expect persecution (cf. 2 Tim. 3:14), but, as in the case of Paul, such persecution may give us opportunities to spread the gospel. Third, we, even as Christians, must guard ourselves against envy. With the Jews, the main reason, in both Antioch and Jerusalem, that they persecuted Paul was because of jealousy and envy over the gospel being preached to the Gentiles and over the large crowds of followers.

### **Paul’s Controversies with Gentiles**

Along with the controversies Paul suffered from the Jews, he also occasionally endured confrontation with the Gentiles. Sometimes the Gentiles were provoked and agitated against Paul by the Jews, as they were at Lystra and Thessalonica (cf. 14:19; 17:5). At other times, however, they persecuted Paul and his companions for their own selfish reasons. For example, in Philippi, the owners of a slave girl and the city leaders beat and imprisoned Paul and Silas (16:16-40), and, later, while he was in Ephesus, Paul was persecuted by Demetrius the silversmith (19:23ff).

In both of the latter examples, the controversies resulted from money and greed. In Philippi, after the slave girl’s owners “saw their hope of profit was gone,” Luke says, “they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities” (16:19). In Ephesus, Demetrius caused “a great commotion” (19:23), Luke records, by assembling his fellow craftsmen and pointing out to them that, because of Paul’s preaching, they were

losing business and the goddess Diana and her temple were losing prestige (19:26-27). From Demetrius’ speech to the craftsmen, his primary concern was clearly financial; according to verse 25, he said, “Men, you know that we have our prosperity by this trade.”

In Philippi, the controversy resulted in the beating and imprisonment of Paul and Silas (16:22-24), in the jailor being converted (16:25-34), and in the city officials asking Paul and Silas to leave the city (16:35-40). In Ephesus, although Demetrius’ charge was found lacking (19:35-40), the controversy caused Paul to leave for Macedonia (20:1).

Again, what can we learn from Paul’s controversies with the Gentiles? First, we must guard ourselves from the god of materialism and greed (cf. 1 Tim. 6:6-10, 17-19; Matt. 6:24, 33). While the main reason the Jews rejected the gospel and opposed Paul was envy, with the Gentiles, the main reason was money. Unfortunately, even today, like Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen, many turn from or even oppose the gospel because of financial reasons, and even more fail to commit themselves completely to Jesus because of “the deceitfulness of riches” and “the cares of the world” (Mark 4:19). Second, when persecution arises because of God’s word, we as Christians can recourse to our rights as citizens. Paul in Philippi demanded his legal rights as a Roman citizen (16:37). Likewise, in a nation that seems increasingly driven to oppose Christian morality and the public teaching of such, we may use our legal rights as citizens to defend ourselves. Third, persecution is a reason for rejoicing. After Paul and Silas were placed in prison, they “were praying and singing hymns to God” (16:25; cf. Acts 5:41). We too can rejoice in the face of persecution and controversy if we suffer for Christ (Rom. 8:17) and for the gospel (cf. Mark 8:35), because it will result in “praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:7; cf. also vv. 4-9).

### **Conclusion**

Throughout Paul’s life, he was involved in a variety of controversies. Jesus confronted him on the road to Damascus, and, after becoming a Christian, Jews and Gentiles alike confronted

him. His life, therefore, challenges us, whether as Christians or non-Christians, to be confronted by Jesus and decide to obey or reject him, to endure the controversies of persecution that arise because of Christ, and to sound forth the gospel regardless of possible controversy.

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#### **Biographical Sketch**

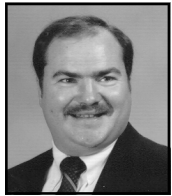
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# Herod

Acts 12

*Bruce Daugherty*

The book of Acts is familiar reading for many Bible students, but as the Hebrew writer states, “we ought to give the more earnest heed to things we have heard, lest we drift away from them” (Heb. 2:1). This lectureship offers a great opportunity for re-anchoring to



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the great truths found in the New Testament book of history. May the examples in Acts give greater encouragement to share the gospel of Christ and to deepen trust in God. May the focus on the book encourage God’s people today to fulfill the Great Commission of sharing the good news in Christ.

In Acts 5, an interesting statement is made by the Jewish council member Gamaliel. The councilman was advising his fellow Jews regarding the path to pursue as they decided the fate of the apostles whom they had arrested. Gamaliel said, “for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it – lest you even be found to fight against God!” (Acts 5:38-39). Taking the cue from this phrase, an interesting study can be made of the book of Acts by looking at those who were “found fighting against God.” Such opposition could be internal, as in the case of Ananias and Sapphira, or it could be external as exemplified in the opposition encountered by the apostles from the Sanhedrin.

A thematic study of this nature can be of benefit for modern day readers for many reasons. First, it allows for a sharpened focus on

what is the will of God. It can be easy to be self-deceived and believe one is serving God when in reality the opposite is true. Second, it serves as a reminder that today, just like then, there will always be opposition to God’s way. God’s people must not be discouraged by the presence of opposition, but like the apostles of old, need to rejoice that we are “counted worthy to suffer shame for His name” (Acts 5:41).

## Preparatory Matters

Before looking at Acts 12, it is helpful to briefly review some introductory matters. Based on the similar dedicatory prologue, the book has been identified as authored by Luke to a Gentile convert by the name of Theophilus (compare Luke 1:1-4 to Acts 1:1-3). Luke’s purpose in so doing is to continue the story begun in his gospel, a gospel designed to confirm the certainty of the message which Theophilus had believed and obeyed (Acts 1:1, Luke 1:4).

Luke’s book of history serves to bridge the gap between the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament (Bruce 53). Luke’s history also bridges the gap between what had originally been primarily a Jewish audience to that which would become more predominant, the Gentile. And Luke’s history also bridges the gap between the story of the Savior found in the Gospels and the stories of the saved contained in the Epistles. Thus, Acts is a vital linchpin tying the New Testament together.

The central message of the book is the testimony to the resurrected Christ. “You shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” ( Acts 1:8). This message had those that gladly received it, and those who opposed it (Acts 2:41; 4:18). This study will focus on what happened when the Roman client king, Herod Agrippa I was found fighting against God. He is only mentioned in the Bible in Acts 12.

Who was this Herod? He was an Idumean, an Edomite, one of the descendants of Esau. Since the time of the Maccabees, the Idumeans had been absorbed into Jewish society. But many Jews refused to recognize them as Jews. He was a grandson of Herod the Great, who had been made a client king of the Roman Empire

in AD 40 (Ferguson 389). Herod was noted for his lavish building projects, but he was also paranoid. The Bible records that he had the innocents slaughtered after the birth of Jesus (Matt. 2:16). This was in keeping with the character of Herod as he murdered rivals to his throne (Ferguson 390). He had his favorite wife, Mariamne, murdered. He also had three adult sons murdered. Due to Herod's blood thirst, Caesar Augustus, making a pun on the Greek words for son (*huios*) and pig (*hus*) is reported to have said that because of Jewish dietary law, "it was better to be Herod's pig than to be Herod's son" (Macrobius 2:4:111).

He was a nephew of Herod Antipas before whom Jesus was tried (Luke 23:6-12). His sister was Herodias, first the wife of her uncle Philip, then divorced and remarried to her uncle Antipas. She was the one who had John the baptizer murdered (Mark 6:14-29). His niece was Salome, whose dance prompted Antipas to promise half his kingdom to her (Mark 6:23). His children were Drusilla, Agrippa II, and Bernice. Agrippa and Bernice were incestuously married and present at the defense of Paul (Acts 25:23).

Sadly, the family, whose talents in building and diplomacy were admirable, left very little of a lasting legacy for the people they ruled. Nothing in the family line was "heroic" which is the meaning of the name Herod. Immorality, intrigue, and violence characterized the family background of Herod Agrippa I.

As a young man Herod had been sent to Rome to avoid the murderous paranoia of his grandfather. After his schooling in Rome he lived a carefree but expensive lifestyle. Debt ridden, he returned home to Judea where he attempted suicide. Following the aborted attempt, family members helped him to secure a position with his uncle Antipas. But he soon fell out with Antipas, and became detested in Antioch. Herod, with the aid of his wife, borrowed money and journeyed back to Rome, seeking his fortune there. In Rome, Herod was able to flatter his way into the friendship of Caligula, the successor to the Imperial throne after Tiberias. His flattery of Caligula sounded too much like treason to Tiberias, and Herod was thrown in the Praetorian prison for six months. But in AD 37, Tiberias died and Caligula ascended to the throne. Herod was released and made tetrarch of the Transjordan

territory once governed by his uncle Philip. In AD 41, Caligula's claims to deity proved to be too outlandish even for the Romans. He was assassinated and Claudius was made Emperor. This was fortunate for Herod, as he had been a school boy companion with Claudius. Herod was favored by Claudius, who added the territory of Judea to his kingdom. Herod Agrippa I became ruler of all the territory his grandfather had once ruled (Reicke 195-97). Herod's brief reign in Judea (AD 41-44), was marked by a calculated political ambition which pursued a pro-Hellenistic policy in his activity outside Judea, but promoted a pro-Pharisee policy inside the country (Reicke 198-200).

### **Persecution Again**

"Now about that time . . ." (Acts 12:1). This was the spring of AD 44. The church had been in existence for about 14 years. Nearly ten years had passed since the martyrdom of Stephen and the subsequent conversion of Saul. The expansion of the Gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 10) came at a time when renewed persecution of the church in Judea was initiated by Herod Agrippa I. This is the first persecution in the book of Acts that came from the civil authorities (Reid 1154). The period of peace enjoyed by the church in Judea (Acts 9:31), was shattered by the violent hands of Herod who had James, the brother of John killed with a sword. Herod's action "pleased the Jews" (Acts 12:3). When Herod saw this, he also imprisoned Peter and intended to harm him after the days of Passover. Perhaps knowing of the disciples' earlier escape from prison (Acts 5:23), Herod took extra measures in guarding Peter as he was placed in an inner prison, and watched by 4 squads of 4 soldiers. Peter was also chained to two soldiers.

Herod had many reasons for wanting to please the Jews. As a grandson of Herod the Great, his Idumean heritage was a long standing thorn of contention with the Jews. But because his throne rested on the mighty arm of Imperial Rome, Jewish opposition to his rule was covert, rather than open. The occasion of persecution against the church gave Herod a way of ingratiating himself with his subjects. Herod was seeking popularity.

Popularity among men was a reason behind rejection of Jesus during His ministry. The Gospel of John records, “Nevertheless, even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue, for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God” (John 12:42-43). Those who seek popularity with friends, peers, or political powers at the expense of devotion to Jesus are fighting against God (James 4:4).

### **Powerful Prayer**

Despite the disappointment and discouragement which must have resulted in seeing James martyred and Peter under heavy guard, the church at Jerusalem was not left without resources in their struggle. Their weapon of warfare was prayer: “. . . [C]onstant prayer was offered to God for him by the church” (Acts 12:5; Eph. 6:18; James 5:16). The adverb translated *constant* can signify both intensity and constancy. Peter, the recipient of this earnest prayer, would later exhort Christians to be earnest in their love (1 Peter 1:22; 4:8). Prayer should be the normal activity of God’s people (1 Thess. 5:17; 1 Peter 1:7).

In light of what had happened to James, and judging by the incredulity of those assembled at Mary’s house (v. 15), it is reasonable to believe that the Christians were not praying for Peter’s release. Instead, it is more likely that they were praying for his faith and courage not to falter, as was the case on the night of Jesus’ arrest (Luke 22:54-62). Their prayer may have been that Peter might follow the example of Stephen and James and glorify the Lord by a triumphant death (McGarvey 234). But God had other plans for Peter.

The Bible records the fact that Peter was sleeping between two soldiers on the night before his execution. Readers are not told whether this sleep was the sleep of great spiritual faith or the sleep of physical exhaustion. But it would appear that Peter had learned from the One Who slept during the tempest how to sleep when facing the tempests of life (Mark 4:38). Any fear Peter might have had of dying was banished by the resurrection of Jesus and fear of judgment was overcome by knowledge of being covered by the

blood of Christ. Peter was prepared for death and the hereafter (Reese 431).

But just hours before his execution, Peter was freed from prison and the murderous plans of Herod. “This was not a jailbreak master minded by clever Christians” (Roper, “What” 17). By means of a miracle, God released Peter from prison. Dramatically, the angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. The angel struck Peter in the side and told him to get up. The chains fell off Peter’s hands, but the guards remained asleep. Half asleep, Peter obeyed the angel’s commands to put on his sandals and his cloak. They passed through the first and second guard posts and came to the iron gate that leads into the city. The massive door opened automatically to them and they passed out into the street. At this point, the angel left and Peter, seeing the moon and stars above him, realized it was not a dream. “No miracle more complicated or more unexpected had ever been wrought” (McGarvey 235).

In contrast to a previous miraculous release from prison, Peter did not receive any instructions about where to go following his release (Acts 5:20). His course of action was two-fold: inform the brethren of his release, and make good his escape. This took him first to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark. This is the first mention of the young disciple whose future would be entwined with Barnabas, Paul, and Peter (Acts 12:25, 13:13; 15:37-38; 2 Tim. 4:11).

At this point a humorous incident is recorded by Luke. In response to Peter’s knocking at the outer gate, a young servant girl named Rhoda came to answer but when she heard Peter’s voice, she failed to open the door to Peter, but ran in to inform the household of his presence. While the episode contains features found in Greco-Roman stories of runaway slaves (Reid 1979), there is no need to look at it as fictional. Reality is often more humorous than fiction. The humor continued as the Christians gathered inside could not believe the report that Peter was standing outside. Again, this would suggest that they had been praying for something other than Peter’s release. Rhoda’s insistence was met with the strange explanation that “it was his angel.” This



supposition mixed with superstition (McGarvey 237) gave way to amazement as the door was finally opened to Peter who had continued knocking. As their joy must have been becoming audible, Peter motioned for them to keep silent. He recounted the details of his release and asked them to inform James and the rest of the brethren about the good news. This James is believed to be James the Lord's brother (Matt. 13:55), and one whom Paul called a pillar in the Church at Jerusalem (Gal. 1:19; 2:9; Acts 15:13; 21:18).

With the first part of his plan accomplished, Peter left and went to another place. This was for his safety as well as theirs. Though Peter will be briefly mentioned at the Jerusalem meeting (Acts 15), this would be the last major event in the life of Peter as recorded by Luke. The first half of the book which concentrated on the work of Peter now closes to give way to the second half which will focus on the work of Paul.

### **Perplexing Questions**

Why did God save Peter from execution, but not James? This is a question that the text forces the reader to confront. As with many questions concerning the actions of God, it reminds readers that God's ways are not man's ways. I do not believe that God acts capriciously at any time, but I am at a loss to know why one was spared and not the other. This episode would also remind Christians not to buy into a health and wealth message which says God's servants never suffer. While Peter himself said, "For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil" (1 Peter 3:12). A few verses later he says, "For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil" (1 Peter 3:17). Adversity and suffering are part of the lot of the Christian.

Had the church at Jerusalem prayed for James or had the believers been lulled into believing that the apostles were always going to be present? Was the death of James a test of the church in Jerusalem? Was it a reminder that God was not limited to just the 12 apostles? Was it a necessary step in the change of the leadership in the church at Jerusalem?

Satisfactory answers to these questions will never be possible this side of heaven, but it should give every Christian pause to reflect and meditate when the unexpected happens in life. What should be expected in answer to prayer? How should one respond, especially in times of discouragement, disappointment, and delay? Can we stay faithful to God when some servants are spared but some are called home?

### **Punishment of the Proud**

The narrative of chapter twelve turns to the disturbance among the soldiers the morning after Peter's escape. Herod's plot had been foiled despite his precautions against an escape happening. The examination of the soldiers could only reveal the fact that a miracle had occurred or that all 16 of the soldiers had conspired together to release Peter. The idea of a conspiracy can not be accepted by rational individuals, because the soldiers knew that they would pay with their lives if a prisoner escaped on their watch. But Herod in his pride, chose to deny the reality of the miracle and ordered the guards to be killed. Herod then left Jerusalem and took up residence in his palace at Caesarea.

The final scene in the chapter is also the final scene of Herod's life (Roper, "The Man" 26). His final days are also recounted by the Jewish historian Josephus (Antiquities 460). On display in both accounts are all the qualities of pride which led to Herod's downfall.

Luke tells of Herod's anger with the citizens of the Phoenician cities of Tyre and Sidon. Since these people were fed from Herod's territory, they decided to pursue a quick peace settlement so that their food supply would not be threatened. They chose to approach Herod through his personal aid, Blastus. Arrangements were made for them to have an audience with the king on an appointed day. According to Josephus, this day coincided with a celebration that Herod was having in honor of Claudius Caesar (412). On the second day of the feast, Herod, dressed in his royal apparel, took a seat at court and made a speech. At this point, the Phoenicians began shouting their flattery, "The voice of a god, and not of a

man” (Acts 12:22). Josephus’ account parallels Luke. He says that Herod,

put on a garment made wholly of silver, and of a contexture truly wonderful, and came into the theatre early in the morning; at which time the silver of his garment being illuminated by the fresh reflection of the sun’s rays upon it, shone out after surprising manner and was so resplendent . . . and presently his flatterers cried out, one from one place, and another from another, (though not for his good), that he was a god. (412)

But Luke says, “Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God” (Acts 12:23).

Flattery had brought Herod to the throne, but flattery also proved to be his downfall. Herod suffered a painful illness, in which Josephus says he agonized for five days before he died. Like many a king before him, Herod learned the hard way that he was not a god. Had he ever read the confession of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar (Roper, “What” 22)? “Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all of whose works are truth and His ways justice. And those who walk in pride He is able to put down” (Dan. 4:37).

### **Prevailing of the Word**

In contrast to the downfall and end of Herod, the Bible says, “But the word of God grew and multiplied.” This is a result that is in evidence after each encounter with opposition in the book of Acts (4:4; 5:14, 42; 6:7; 8:4; 9:31). “The pattern is clear. Each trouble, whether from within or without, was an opportunity for the church to lunge forward and sprout new spiritual growth” (Poe). Why does God permit His people to undergo suffering and trial? “We also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance, and perseverance character, and character, hope” (Rom. 5:3-4).

The growth of the church, occurring with the preaching of the Word, would be in evidence in the mission of Barnabas and Saul, accompanied by John Mark which begins in chapter 13.

### **Pondering the Lessons**

The lessons from this chapter are two-fold: faith as demonstrated in the Christians and humility, the opposite of which was demonstrated by Herod. Faith is needed in the face of opposition. Prayer is the powerful weapon of faith placed at the disposition of God’s people. “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints” (Eph. 6:18). “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith” (1 John 5:4)

Negative examples can also be a way of learning (1 Cor. 10:11-12). Herod’s life stands as a testimony to the fact that “Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall” (Prov. 16:18). God’s people today must not imitate Herod, but the example of Peter who told Cornelius who was about to worship him, “Stand up, I myself am also a man” (Acts 10:26). Peter would exhort Christians to “. . . be clothed with humility for, ‘God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’ Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time” (1 Peter 5:5-6). We may not be tempted to think of ourselves as gods like Herod, but notice again why the angel struck Herod down: “because he did not give God the glory.” The request of the Psalmist needs to be on the lips of God’s people today: “Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to Your name give glory, because of your mercy and your truth” (Ps. 115:1). Lives of ingratitude and selfishness do not glorify God! We may prove to be descendants of Herod if we are not a humble and grateful people.

The story of Herod in Acts 12 confronts every reader as to whom will be Lord in his or her life. Herod, raised in a royal family, well acquainted with the politics of flattery at court, accustomed to a lavish lifestyle, never showed in his life the remotest acknowledgment that there is a God in heaven whom he needed to

serve. James and Peter acknowledged, in life and in death, that they relied on the will of God. In an age in which material possessions fill many with a sense of self importance, may our lives demonstrate that Jesus Christ is Lord.

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#### Biographical Sketch

Bruce is married to the former Gayle Gleaton of Stockbridge, GA. They have two sons: Mike, age 23, and Vince, age 20. He is a graduate of Freed-Hardeman University (1981) and Harding Graduate School of Religion (2006).

Bruce was an associate minister with the Graham Rd. congregation in Reynoldsburg, OH, from 1981-83. He did mission work in Cervignano, Italy, from 1983-1990. He preached for the Beville Rd. congregation in Daytona Beach, FL, from 1990-2000. Since 2000, he has been preaching for the 10<sup>th</sup> & Clairmont Sts. Church of Christ in Cambridge, OH.

In addition to preaching, Bruce has served as an instructor in the Florida School of Preaching from 1995-2000 where he taught Denominational Doctrines, Minor Prophets, Restoration History, and World Religions. He has been an instructor at West Virginia School of Preaching from 2000-present where he teaches Church History and Restoration History.

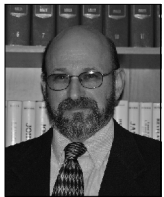
Bruce has held gospel meetings in Florida, Ohio, and West Virginia. He has participated in campaigns in Ohio, Virginia, Italy, Botswana and Zambia. He has spoken on several lectureships and has had articles published in the *Carolina Messenger*, *Christian Bible Teacher*, *Gospel Advocate*, *Restoration Quarterly*, and *West Virginia Christian*.

# The Death of Stephen

Acts 6:8-7:60

Mike Reese

In the southwest corner of the main floor of the Administration building on the campus of Freed-Hardeman University in Henderson, TN, lies the M. S. Mason memorial room. This room is a memorial to Marshall Spencer, former instructor at Freed-



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Hardeman and gospel preacher who was gunned down in “cold blood” for preaching the pure and simple New Testament message of salvation through Jesus Christ. Brother Mason had been preaching a Gospel meeting for the Bethel Grove Church of Christ located about five miles northwest of Judsonia, AR. He had been staying at the home of Joe Miller. At approximately 6:45 p.m., October 1, 1930, John Miller, an unfaithful Christian and father of Joe Miller, fired a shotgun at point blank range just back of the right ear of Mason killing him instantly. It was reported that the first statement made by Joe Miller after the murder was that he didn’t like any preacher (Yingling qtd. in Morgan, 132; Moore 4). One cannot help but be appalled by the violent nature of this wicked deed. One’s mind naturally drifts back through the annals of history reflecting on faithful Christians who have died as a direct result of their faith in Jesus the Messiah, to the first martyr, Stephen. Stephen’s death, recorded by the inspired pen of Luke the physician in Acts 6:8 through 7:60, points to a heightened polarization between the enemies of the Cross and the disciples of Jesus.

## Context, Background and Setting

Acts 6:8-15 sets the stage for the accusations brought against Stephen. Stephen was one of the seven chosen by the Jerusalem church to oversee the benevolent work for the Hellenist widows (Acts 6:1-7). He was described as “. . . a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit” (Acts 6:5) and “. . . being full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people” (v. 8). He was the first non-apostle to perform miracles, obviously having the gift imparted by the “laying on of the apostles’ hands” (Acts 8:18; 2 Tim. 1:6). Being a Hellenist himself, he formed a connection between the Hellenist Christians and his accusers from the Synagogue of the Freedmen, most likely Hellenists themselves (Acts 6:9).

The previous two persecutions of Acts 5 originated in the Temple which was primarily controlled by the Sadducees and was directed at the apostles (Gaertner 122). Now the persecution expanded to the non-apostle Stephen, and originated in the predominately Pharisee controlled synagogue. Most likely the accusers were from a single synagogue comprised of former slaves who had gained their release and had formerly lived in Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia, and Asia and had now settled in Jerusalem (123). Undoubtedly, Stephen knew his accusers intimately.

McGarvey noted:

Stephen, being a Hellenist had doubtless been a member of the Synagogue before he became a Christian, and by his new connection he had not forfeited membership. Most naturally, when he began the public advocacy of the new faith, he did so in the synagogue of which he was already a member, and undertook the conviction and conversion of his former associates. This brought on the conflict. (112)

It has also been suggested that with the mention of Cilicia that Saul of Tarsus may have attended this synagogue when in Jerusalem (Bruce 133). With the influential Pharisees taking the lead in this persecution “. . . they poison the minds of the people by seizing

upon certain utterances of Stephen which need to be only slightly distorted in order to form the grounds of very serious charges” (McGarvey 114).

The false charges brought against Stephen by false witnesses were all under the heading of blasphemy: blasphemy against Moses, God, the Temple and the Law. With the ever-so-slight twist of Stephen’s words taken out of context the accusers elevated the charges to a capital offense worthy of death in their minds. It is possibly by design that these charges took nearly the same tack as those brought against Jesus. In their understanding, by changing Jewish customs he would be guilty of blasphemy against God.

### **Stephen’s Defense**

In English translations fifty-three verses of Acts chapter seven are dedicated to Stephen’s defense before the High Priest and the council. If Caiaphas was the high priest at this time (he remained in office until AD 36 (Gaertner 125), he once again encountered the hated “sect of the Jews.” He had been responsible for the death of Jesus (Matt. 26:57-66) had recently punished the apostles for preaching in Jesus’ name (Acts 5:40) and now questions Stephen if the accusations brought against him were true (Acts 7:1).

Stephen’s defense masterfully surveyed Israelite history from the calling of Abraham to the building of Solomon’s Temple by concentration on three main topics: the Patriarchal Period (vv. 2-16); Moses and the law (vv. 17-43; and the Tabernacle and the Temple (vv. 44-50). While not defending himself directly, Stephen built an irrefutable case that salvation was now universal, true worship was not isolated to the Temple and eternal hope was found only in the great prophet like Moses in the person of the resurrected Jesus of Nazareth.

Stephen began by recalling God’s calling of their common father Abraham (initially found in Genesis 12:1ff.). Scoffers and Modernists have tried unsuccessfully to discredit Stephen’s historical accuracy. Careful scholarship has easily vindicated the ancient historian. Where applicable the alleged “problems” will be briefly addressed. Stephen apparently combined the call of

Abraham from both the Ur of the Chaldeans (Gen. 15:7) and Haran (Gen. 12:1). Bruce has noted:

Here, in v.3 he quotes from Gen.12:1 the words which God spoke to Abraham in Haran after his father’s death, but gives them a setting before Abraham migrated to Haran on the first stage of his journey. Gen. 15:7 and Neh. 9:7 state that God brought Abraham from Ur, implying that he received a divine communication there as well as later when he had settled in Haran. (146)

It should also be noted that Stephen’s words omit “from your father’s house” found in Genesis 12:1 thus indicating he did not leave his father’s house in the Ur of the Chaldeans as he had in Haran (McGarvey 117).

Another alleged problem is when Stephen had Abraham leaving for Canaan after the death of his father, with Genesis 11:32 having him leaving Haran 60 years before his father’s death. This most likely is explained by the list of Terah’s sons in Genesis 11:27 not being in chronological order with Abraham’s birth coming later in Terah’s life (Gaertner 127). One should not allow these alleged discrepancies to deter one from seeing Stephen’s line of reasoning; God has worked His plan of salvation throughout history. This started with Abraham leaving the Ur of the Chaldeans and moving to Haran, then from Haran to Canaan.

God also fulfilled His promise by giving Isaac to Abraham, and then in a similar fashion giving Jacob to Isaac, and to Jacob the twelve patriarchs. The four hundred years of verse six was rounded from the actual four hundred thirty. The Hebrew Old Testament had the total number of Joseph’s family entering Egypt at seventy (Gen. 46:27; Ex. 1:5; Deut. 10:22) while Stephen listed seventy-five. This can easily be explained by realizing that Stephen read from the Septuagint which added the two sons of Manasseh, the two sons of Ephraim and the one grandson of Ephraim to the seventy (Gaertner 129).

Stephen next noted that the great patriarchs were buried in Shechem in the land of the Samaritans, a country hated by the

Jewish officials. The Genesis account listed two land purchases – one by Abraham at Hebron (Gen. 23:17-18) and one by Jacob at Shechem (Gen. 33:19). It is clear that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were buried at Hebron, while Joseph was buried at Shechem (Josh. 24:32). Stephen utilized what some have called “compressing the narrative” (Gaertner 129). As has been noted:

Apparently Luke has taken bits and pieces from different biblical texts to feature Samaritan Shechem, a region scorned by Stephen’s orthodox Jewish audience because Shechem is associated with Mt. Gerazim, the most sacred site of Samaritan religion and the chief competitor to the temple site in Jerusalem (v.16; cf. Gen. 33:18-20). (Keck 126)

It is understood from the text that those present that day clearly understood Stephen’s logic and intent.

### **Moses and the Law**

The historical review of Moses’ career by Stephen was rather routine. Stephen’s dialogue however served to intensify the accuser’s anger. Repeatedly Stephen emphasized how their ancestors had rejected the message of the prophets even murdering some. Stephen bracketed Israel’s idolatry by giving their first experiment with idolatry in the formation and worship of the Golden Calf with some of the last idol worship practiced during the Divided Kingdom ultimately resulting in deportation and captivity (Bruce 155-56). Stephen’s implications were clear. Just as Israel had historically rejected God’s message through His servants the prophets they now rejected God’s ultimate prophet, Jesus Christ. It should be noted that:

The subtle references to Christ are evident in Stephen’s words at this point. Jesus was the new Moses. Stephen’s contention remained consistent. The temple authorities were standing in the way of the chosen leader of God

whose story was being proclaimed by his disciples. (Gaertner 134)

Stephen’s point was that the changes invoked by Jesus and His disciples were in God’s master plan. To reject these changes and cling to Temple worship was nothing short of idolatry which continued the spiritual legacy of their forefathers.

### **The Tabernacle and the Temple**

But what about the Temple? Surely this was to be a permanent fixture in God’s economy. McGarvey has noted, “Instead of either admitting or formally denying the charge of blasphemy against the temple, the speaker proceeds to show very briefly the true religious value of that building” (128). Stephen masterfully showed that both the Tabernacle and the Temple were certainly in God’s plan having been built from God’s inspired plans (vv. 44, 47). However, the omnipresent God cannot be contained in a tent or even an edifice as grand as Solomon’s Temple (The current Temple to which Stephen referenced paled in comparison to the original.) Both Sadducees and Pharisees were mistaken in assuming that God needed the Temple in Jerusalem. Neither the temporary, portable Tabernacle nor the Temple were permanent nor could they be the real dwelling place of God (vv. 48-50). True worship of God was no longer centered in a place but in the Christ (John 4). It has been noted that:

Jesus’ criticism of the Temple as the central symbol of Jewish faith, followed now by Stephen, is deeply rooted in Christianity’s core conviction that we are a people gathered together and marked out by our faith in a person. Jesus Christ sanctifies the place—any place—where the congregation gathers for worship and instruction. (Keck 133)

### **Stephen’s Application**

In verses fifty one through fifty three, Stephen makes application of his argument. Stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears,

he called them (v. 51). In Exodus 33:5 God had called them a stiff-necked people; they still were.

To be uncircumcised in heart and ears meant “that while they were circumcised in the literal sense, their disobedience and unresponsiveness to God’s revelation were such as might have been expected from the Gentiles to who He had not made known His will as He did to Israel” (Bruce 162).

Stephen’s line of thought was easy to follow. God’s mighty plan of redemption began full force with the call of Abraham. Joseph, the divinely selected savior of his brethren had been sold into slavery. Moses had been rejected. All of the prophets had basically been rejected. The final prophet, the one in which all other prophets spoke, whom Stephen described as the “Just One” (v. 53) they had rejected, betrayed and murdered. Not only had they rejected the Messiah they had rejected His message (v. 53).

### **Stephen’s Death**

The hearers’ reaction was swift and decisive. If they had been unable to “resist the wisdom and spirit” by which Stephen spoke earlier their inability was even more evident now. As they ground their teeth in anger the text notes they were cut to the heart. Literally they felt as if their heart had been cut through with the rough teeth of a saw (McGarvey 131). McGarvey described the scene as follows:

The exasperation of the Sanhedrin was as sudden as was the explosion of feeling with which the discourse came to an end; and it was the more intense because the denunciation hurled in their teeth was not a mere burst of passion, but the deliberate announcement of righteous judgment, sustained by his array of analogies from Scripture, the bearing of which now flashed suddenly upon their minds. (131)

To add “insult to injury” Stephen’s righteous actions received God’s approval with his vision of the standing Christ at the right hand of God (vv. 55-57).

Explanations of this vision have been numerous and varied. Earlier, Jesus stood in similar circumstances to Stephen and was asked by the same council and most likely the same high priest, “Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?” (Mark 14:61). Jesus responded, “I am, and you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven” (Mark 14:62). Jesus had been found guilty of blasphemy and crucified for His response. As Bruce has noted “And now Stephen in the same place was making the same claim on Jesus’ behalf as He had made for Himself: he was claiming, in fact, that the words of Jesus had not been blasphemous and false but words of sober truth which had received their vindication and fulfillment from God” (165).

Peter, quoting David, used Jesus’ position at the right hand of God as a proof that God’s spiritual kingdom was now in existence with Jesus reigning as King (Acts 2). This is the kingdom referenced by Daniel to which “all peoples, nations and languages should serve Him” (Dan. 7:14). This kingdom would include men and women from all nations, not just the Jews. Also, Jesus’ presence at the right hand of God meant that “for His people there was now a way of access to God more immediate and heart-satisfying than the temple ritual had ever been able to provide” (Bruce 166). In addition to Jesus’ position at the right hand of God signifying His priestly and kingly role, the standing posture may signify Jesus as Stephen’s witness. Although Stephen was being condemned in an earthly court, Stephen was being vindicated in the heavenly court upon the witness of Jesus his “Paraclete” (168).

The council had only two choices upon this hearing: vindicate Stephen and thus accept Jesus as the Messiah; or, subject Stephen to Jesus’ same fate. They chose the latter.

With a loud cry the angry mob “ran at him with one accord” (v. 57). This execution seemed to combine characteristics of a Levitical stoning with a mob “lynching.” It is clear from Deuteronomy 17:7 that the witness had the duty of casting the first stone in this form of execution. The ancient practice of stoning has been described the following way:

The officials 'stoning' of the Mishna consisted of throwing the criminal over a precipice, and rolling a heavy stone on to his chest. One witness threw him over head first, turned him over, and rolled a stone down. If this did not kill him, the second witness rolled down another stone. (Jackson and Lake 85)

There is no clear reason why the executioners laid their clothes at the feet of Saul. Apparently the executioners continued to cast stones as Stephen prayed. It is significant that, like Jesus, Stephen prayed for the forgiveness of his executioners. It is also significant that unlike Jesus, who commended His spirit into the hands of His Father (Luke 23:46), Stephen asked the Lord Jesus to receive his spirit. This signified the deity of Jesus. Stephen then passed into eternity.

### Lessons, Reflections and Observations

The following are several lessons, reflections and observations gleaned from the text.

1. Like Stephen, if one is a disciple of Jesus, he/she may very well suffer like Jesus. In John 16:33, Jesus promised tribulation for His followers but peace in Him. In Acts 14:22 one enters the kingdom through "many tribulations." Those who desire to live godly in Jesus Christ will suffer persecution (2 Tim. 3:12). Peter cautioned Christians to not think it strange when faced with the fiery trial (1 Peter 4:12).
2. Worship is not confined to a building. One can worship God at any place at any time (Acts 7:48-50).
3. Those who reject Jesus likewise reject God the Father.
4. Jesus is deity (Acts 7:59).
5. Jesus is alive (Acts 7:56).

6. God the Father and Jesus the Son both endorsed Stephen's message (Acts 7:56).
7. Jesus is at the right hand of God. Therefore all the Scriptures concerning Jesus presently serving as Priest, King, Intercessor, etc. are verified by Stephen's heavenly vision (Acts 7:56).
8. People today, like the audience to whom Stephen spoke, can resist the Holy Spirit by rejecting the Word written by the Holy Spirit through inspired men (Acts 7:51).
9. It is not how one starts but how one finishes life that matters (Acts 8:1; 22:19-21).
10. Actions from youth, although forgiven by God may haunt one the rest of one's life (1 Tim. 1:12-17).
11. Christians are able to die in joy even though the cause of death may be hideous and cruel (Acts 7:53-60).

May Stephen encourage all to be faithful to the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns at the right hand of the Father, even if it demands dying the martyr's death of Stephen.

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### **Biographical Sketch**

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## Lydia

Acts 16:12-15

Steve Stevens



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There are only four verses in the Holy Record that refer to Lydia—Acts 16:13-15, 40. Her name is mentioned twice in Acts 16:14 and Acts 16:40. Read them with me:

And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither. And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us. . . . And they went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed.

Our study takes us to the time of the second missionary journey of Paul. Silas was chosen to accompany him as they returned to visit brethren in every city where the word of the Lord had been preached on the first missionary journey. As they traveled from Antioch in Syria they went westward overland into Cilicia. Journeying further West they entered Pisidia and in particular they

went to Derbe and Lystra where Timothy was enlisted to be part of the missionary team. Next they traveled through Phrygia and Galatia and would have gone into Asia (Minor) but were forbidden by the Holy Ghost to preach the Word there. This Asia was on the Eastern shore of the Aegean Sea and would later become home to the seven Churches that John wrote to in Revelation chapters 2 and 3.

Their journey took them further westward to Mysia where they determined they would go northward into Bythynia. However, once again the Spirit would not permit them to go there. Journeying further westward they arrived at the town of Troas. Here Paul had a vision at night of a man from Macedonia asking him to “come and help us” (Acts 16:9). Immediately, they endeavored to go there and preach the Gospel.

A careful examination of the pronouns used in Acts 16:7, 8, and 10 reveals that the writer of the narrative (Luke) joined Paul, Silas, and Timothy in Troas and then accompanies them on the Macedonian call that will lead them to Philippi. Notice that Acts 16:7, 8 refers to “they” which would include Paul, Silas, and Timothy as they approach and arrive in Troas. Then in Acts 16:10 the pronoun changes to “we” (which would now include Luke) as the four of them progress to Macedonia and ultimately Philippi.

There are a number of providential blessings that expedite this journey. First, there was a ship already at Troas sailing for Neapolis which is rare. Secondly, it was fully laden and ready to sail that very day. Thirdly, it was able to sail straight course which indicates that the prevailing wind stayed very favorable and consistent the whole journey. Fourthly, it only took two days to get there, which is quite significant considering that in Acts 20:6 it took five days to make the same voyage in the opposite direction from Philippi to Troas.

Upon arrival in Philippi the group watched and observed the activities going on in the city for certain days. On the sabbath day the four missionaries went out of the city and to the river side where prayer customarily took place and sat down. Women came to this place of prayer and as they did the men began speaking to

them and kept speaking to them. One of those women was named Lydia and she is the subject of our study this hour.

The first item (I am indebted to Herbert Lockyer for the six major points outlined in this lesson, 84-85) we learn about Lydia is that she is a “seller of purple.” **Lydia was a business woman.** She is a *porphuropolis* from *porphura* which means “purple, a reddish-purple” and *poleo* which means “to sell.” “The purple” refers to both the dye used and the fabric which was dyed. Cleon Rogers states that there were three possible sources of dye which were used to color the fabric: (1) shellfish murex; (2) kermes oak; (3) madder root (269). The techniques used produced varying shades of the color “purple” from what we know as royal purple, to ox blood, to scarlet red, to indigo. The dyes and the fabrics were expensive with the dye made from the shellfish murex being outlandishly expensive. Lydia was much like the virtuous woman of Proverbs 31. She worked willingly with her hands (v. 13), she perceives her merchandise is good (v. 18), her clothing is silk and purple (v. 22), and she makes fine linen, sells it and delivers girdles to the merchant (v. 24). She ran her business on both sides of the Aegean Sea and apparently she was successful at it for she had her own home, either rented or owned, which was large enough to accommodate her, her staff, and four men while providing for all of their needs.

The second thing that we learn about **Lydia** is that she **was from the city of Thyratira.** Thyratira was a city noted for its many labor guilds. One of which was the *dyers*. The water of the area was well suited to producing the brilliant colors and permanency desired when dyeing fabrics, particularly very expensive ones. As noted in the introduction, Thyatira was in Asia (Minor) where the Holy Spirit had forbidden Paul to preach, and yet the first person who hears and obeys the Gospel in Macedonia is Lydia a woman from that very region! Later, in Acts 19, on the third missionary journey Paul will arrive in Ephesus and over the course of the next two years all of Asia (Minor) will hear the Word of the Lord Jesus. The last mention we have of Thyatira is in the seven letters to the churches in Asia in Revelation chapter 2:18-29. It is encouraging that even after all of those passing years there were still faithful

Christians in Thyatira who maintained sound doctrine and lived pure lives which the Lord exhorted to hold fast until He come. Sadly, there was immorality and idolatry in that congregation as well. What a sobering reminder of the spiritual battle that rages both in the world and in the body of Christ.

The third fact we learn about Lydia is that she “worshipped God.” **Lydia was a devout woman.** The word “worshipped” used here is *sebomai* and Vine defines it meaning as “to revere” stressing the feeling of awe or devotion (686). The object of her reverence and awe was “the God.” Was Lydia a Jewess or a non-Jewess? One cannot be dogmatic; however, Lydia did worship God on the sabbath day which could be a possible clue to her religious affiliation. If she were a non-Jewess, then would she have to be a proselyte? Not necessarily. Kirsopp Lake maintains that some non-Jews who feared God became proselytes while others did not. He goes on to contend that this fringe of non-Jews who were not satisfied with heathenism and who were hesitant to become proselytes provided Christian missionaries with the best possible opportunity for making converts (77). Whatever the case, Lydia had a reverence for and a fear of the true and living God. She closed her business every sabbath day and spent it in prayer and the fellowship of others who revered and feared God as she did. This certainly would not have been the business practice of her competitors in Philippi. May we learn in our devotion to the living God to put Him before all other concerns in this worldly life.

The fourth insight we have from our text concerning Lydia is that she *heard* what the four missionaries spoke. These four men seized the opportunity to preach the full counsel of the Word of God to these women who manifested an interest in and a devotion for Him. Lydia listened intently, attentively, and thoroughly to all that was being taught. **Lydia was a seeking woman.** She was ignorant of the great truths of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The facts of His death, burial, and resurrection according to the Scriptures were unknown to her until that day. The fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies in His life were not understood and applied until that day. The spiritual blessings she could enjoy in Christ were revealed that day. The power of the Gospel to save one from

their past sins and have God remember them no more had eluded her until that hour. The plan of salvation, the worship of God in spirit and in truth, the bearing of one's cross daily, and learning of the yoke of Jesus were all new to her heart and mind. So much had been revealed, clarified, and brought together for her.

"The Lord opened" her heart. The Scriptures declare it and truth it is. What does it mean? One's bias or theological perspective probably has more to do with what one thinks this means than what the text says and the context will support. Luke wrote this about Lydia's conversion and mentioned it in no other conversion in Acts. Did something unique happen here that happens in no other? Surely one could not conclude such a thing for it would make God a respecter of persons, would it not? Yet, one very popular explanation given in commentary after commentary attributes the opening of Lydia's heart to the direct operation of the Holy Spirit who illuminates her mind and makes it possible for her to receive spiritual truths. Dear reader, that surely reads a whole lot into both the text and the context that is not written there.

The word *open* is *dianoigo* which means to open wide or completely like a folding door. To open the heart is to expand its conception of a subject. Lydia was seeking a right relationship with the God of heaven and these four men, particularly Paul, taught her what she needed to know in a deeper level of understanding so she could obtain it. However, the text says that it was the Lord who opened her heart. Yes, it does and now we ask "By what means?" Recall for now the introduction to this lesson. The Holy Spirit forbade Paul and company to go to two places. Paul had a vision of a man from Macedonia asking for help. The journey to Philippi was as fast and without incident as possible. The first outing from the city brought Paul and his co-workers to a place of prayer where women were gathering in fear of God. Is it only coincidence that all of these things worked together to get the men with the knowledge of the truth and the women who were seeking it together at the same time in the same place? I think not! Was the Lord doing His providential part to achieve His purpose? Yes, and He did it by the means of these men who spoke the truth to a woman with a good and honest heart prepared to receive it.

The text does not demand or even hint at a *direct operation* of the Lord on Lydia's heart, neither does the context.

God sends the Light to illuminate the hearts and minds of men. When the Light strikes us we have the choice to momentarily endure the glare and adjust to see clearly what is there. Or, we can cover and close our hearts to shield them from the momentary glare and forever remain in the dimness or darkness to which we have grown accustomed.

Let us examine some other cases of conversion in Acts. On Pentecost in Acts 2 verse 14 reveals that it took Peter and the eleven speaking to preach the Gospel, and the results in verse 37 involve their being "pricked in their hearts" and inquiring what they needed to do. In Acts 8 verse 6 Philip spoke and the Samaritans "gave heed" to what he preached. In Acts 8 verse 30 Philip asked the Ethiopian eunuch, "Understandeth what thou readest" to which he replied, "How can I except some man guide me?" It was not the Holy Spirit guiding the Ethiopian, friends, it was Philip! Acts 9 verse 6 shows us Saul of Tarsus needed to be told what to do, and Ananias was sent by the Lord to tell him. Acts chapter 10 records that Cornelius had to send for Peter (even though he already had an angel present) so Peter could "tell him what he ought to do" (v. 6). The Holy Spirit directed Peter (10:19, 20) to go doubting nothing and preach to Cornelius. In Acts 16:30 the Philippian jailor asked Paul and Silas, "What must I do to be saved?" There is no mention of the Lord doing anything in this text, however verse 32 says "they spoke unto him the word of the Lord and to all that were in his house." Is there a common thread here? Yes, faithful men preaching the Word of Truth to those who need and want to know how they can be saved. In every conversion it is the Lord who opens the heart, but not directly. He uses human instruments who preach and teach the inspired Word of God to do so. Luke's phraseology may be unique to Lydia's conversion account, but its meaning is common to all of the accounts. Paul addresses this in Romans 10:13-17:

For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they

have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

The fifth detail we learn about Lydia is that she “attended unto the things spoken by Paul.” The word “attended” is *prosecho*. It is used in at least two senses in the New Testament. First, read Acts 8:6: “And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.” “Gave heed” is the translation of *prosecho*. Here it means to mentally concentrate on something. Secondly, read 1 Timothy 4:13: “Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.” Here it obviously refers to putting into practice what you have been instructed to do. Since Lydia has already heard and taken the teaching to heart it would only make sense to understand the phrase “attended unto” in the second sense of putting what she was taught into practice.

“And when she was baptized” reveals that **Lydia was a Christian woman**. The first convert on European soil was an Asiatic woman. She did not enter the Christian race alone for the text reveals her household was baptized as well. It is often asserted that the ‘household baptisms’ in the New Testament imply that infants were baptized along with the rest of the family. Let us briefly note each ‘household baptism’ and the details given in each one to see if such a conclusion is justifiable. (1) Acts 10:24-28, the household of Cornelius. In this case, when the Holy Spirit fell upon them, they all spake with tongues and magnified God. Therefore, all those baptized on this occasion did things which no infant could possibly do. (2) Acts 16:31-34, the household of the jailor. Here it is explicitly stated that all those baptized also “rejoiced, believing in God.” This would certainly rule out any infant responses. (3) 1 Corinthians 1:16, the household of

Stephanus. If one will read 1 Corinthians 16:15 he will learn that the “house of Stephanus . . . addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints” which would be impossible for any infant to do. (4) Acts 18:8; 1 Corinthians 1:14, the household of Crispus. In Acts it is clearly written that the house of Crispus “believed on the Lord” thus demonstrating again no infants were involved. (5) Acts 16:15, the household of Lydia. Could this be the exception needed? No! McGarvey states that this is an assumption based on at least five other assumptions: 1) some of Lydia’s household were baptized without believing; 2) Lydia must have been a married woman (at least at some point in her life); 3) Lydia had children; 4) One or more of Lydia’s children were infants; 5) Her infant child or children were so young they had to come from Thyatira to Philippi to be with her (205). It remains impossible to prove even one case of an infant baptized in any ‘household baptism.’ P. Weigandt in his entry on *oikos* in *The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* writes:

In none of these uses of the expression “...and his house” is it possible to deduce specifically which persons are intended. In any case, however, the context restricts us to the conclusion that infants and small children are not included. This is also true for the report that “the house of...has been baptized (Acts 16: 15a, 33; 1 Cor.1:16) or saved (Acts 11:14; 16:31) or has believed (Acts 18:8). Neither expression can tell us whether the Christian Church in the New Testament baptized infants or small children. It is possible that Luke made use of expressions such as “...and his (whole) house (with the exception of John 4:53, found only in Acts) to allude to the resulting establishment of churches. (205)

The sixth quality of Lydia set forth in our text is that she besought Paul and his company to come into her house and stay there. **Lydia was a hospitable woman**. “If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord” is a rich protasis. “Have judged” is a perfect active indicative verb emphasizing the lasting result. In

other words, the judging has been done and now the verdict stands. The “if” is part of a first class conditional sentence which affirms the reality of the condition from the standpoint of the speaker. The idea here is that “since you have judged me to be a person that is faithful, reliable, and trustworthy to the Lord, then entering into my house, abide.” Lydia pressed them on the matter until they accepted her gracious hospitality. Part of her being a hospitable woman was not taking ‘no’ for an answer. Her home becomes their center of operations while in Philippi for their short stay. Even upon release from prison in verse 40 they come back to Lydia’s before leaving for Thessalonica.

The last point in this lesson is implied in her being faithful to the Lord. Her life, her household, her house, and now even her business are centered on Christ. She puts herself and all that she has at His service. **Lydia is now a consecrated woman.** She now cares for the Lord’s church and His workers. Her life up to this day had been involved in selling her purple garments to all who wanted and could afford them. Now she has another garment to offer not just to the people who want and can afford it, but a “white raiment” (Rev. 3:4, 5, 18) that all can wear rich or poor alike. What could such a woman do with an offer like that? Only in eternity will we know fully what she or any of us can do in a world that is spiritually naked when we come with an offer of “white raiment” which is already bought and paid for and needs only to be accepted and worn. May this woman inspire us with her great character whether we are seeking to find the Will of the Lord or doing our best with all we have to serve the Will of the Lord.

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### Biographical Sketch

Steve Stevens is a native to West Virginia. His father is Earl Stevens and his mother is Vonda Tuttle Stevens. He was baptized by his father in January of 1967 at the Dewey Avenue Church of Christ in St. Marys, WV. He began conducting Vacation Bible Schools and holding Gospel Meetings in 1970 while still in High School. He preached for the next five years for over 35 congregations in West Virginia, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. In 1975 he located with the Norway Church of Christ outside of Fairmont, WV, until he moved to his present work with the congregation in Hundred, WV, in April of 1981 where he now serves in his 30<sup>th</sup> year as their preacher. He was a charter faculty member of West Virginia School of Preaching teaching the “Life of Christ,” “Marriage and the Family,” and New Testament Greek. He was absent as an instructor at WVSOP from 2000 to 2005. In August of 2005 he returned to teach New Testament Greek I, II, III, and IV. He is married to the former Karen Barnhart of New Freeport, PA, and they have eight children: Rebecca Wilson, Melissa Rush, Jonathan Stevens, Stephanie Stevens, Victoria Stevens, Roy Stevens, Aaron Stevens, and Adam Stevens. Steve and Karen have one granddaughter Malina Rush.

# The Crucial Question

Acts 2:37-40

Denver Cooper

## Introduction

After Peter had declared several prophecies fulfilled from the Old Testament many of those Jews were grieving because of what Peter had accused them.



**Denver Cooper** has been preaching the gospel for over 69 years, and presently serves as Director of West Virginia School of Preaching.

Now when they heard this; they were pricked in their hearts: and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Then Peter said unto them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all who are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.” And with many other words did he testify and exhort saying, “Save yourselves from this untoward generation.” (Acts 2:37-40)

I want to express my appreciation to the elders and the lectureship committee for my invitation to appear on this program. I am especially thankful to my Father in heaven for allowing me to live long enough to fill the responsibility.

## Vital Questions

There are many questions which I have asked and which doubtless you have asked which we may feel were important in our lives. When I was a teenager I asked a preacher, “Do you think I should prepare to preach?” He thought I should. My family and many others encouraged me to do so. It was a very important question to me. Later in life I met a very pretty red haired young lady with whom I wanted to spend the balance of my life. However, before I could make that final she let me know that I would have to ask her “papa.” That took a lot of nerve, but after stomping the ground a considerable amount of time I finally got it out. “May I marry your daughter?” I thought he never would get around to telling me what I could do, but after a very complete interrogation he finally said yes. A very important question had been answered for me. Some in the audience may be asking, “How may I become a millionaire?” Many may be asking, “How may I be rid of pain for the rest of my life?” They probably would give all they own if they could receive a positive answer. Others are asking, “How can I have peace of mind from all my troubles?” All of these are important questions, but none so great as that one asked by all of those folks on Pentecost Day. “What must I do?” It is implied, to be saved. That, most certainly is the most important question I ever had to answer, and so it is with you tonight!

Perhaps in this audience there are those who want to know, “What must I do to be saved?” Maybe you are like some I have known through the years who may think that an angel will appear and reveal to them what they want to hear, though I am sure he will not. You would not hear anything different from that which the apostle Peter preached to those on Pentecost. “But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:8).

When I look into the sky, I am reminded of the fact that Jesus is going to return one of these days and I do not know when that will occur. It may well be that it shall be a day like today when so many people are assembled that the trumpet shall sound and we shall hear the loud voice of the Savior. Will you, a Christian, be

prepared to meet him? Or will you be thinking, “I have plenty of time yet and I will return to the fold of Christ someday before long? After all we only know that He is coming.”

And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels; in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power. (2 Thess. 1:7-8)

Peter was so logical and persuasive in pointing out to the Jews the terrible act which they had done that they were pricked in the heart. It was if a pin or a knife had pierced their hearts. Barnes states:

The causes of their grief may have been these: (1) Their sorrow that he had been put to death by his own countrymen. (2) Their deep sense of guilt in having done this. There would be mingled here a remembrance of ingratitude, and a consciousness that they had been guilty of murder of the most aggravated and horrid kind; that of having killed their own Messiah. (3) The fear of his wrath. He was still alive; exalted to be their Lord; and instructed with all power. They were afraid of his vengeance; they were conscious that they deserved it; and they supposed that they were exposed to it. (4) What they had done would not be undone. The guilt remained; they could not wash it out.

They had thus crucified the hope of their nation; imbued their hands in the blood of him to whom the prophets had looked; and put to death the Holy One, the prospect of whose coming men of the world in affliction, and cheered them when they looked on to future years. He who was the hope of their fathers had come and they had put him to death; and it is no wonder that the consciousness of this—

that sense of guilt, and shame, and confusion should overwhelm their minds, and lead them to ask in deep distress, what they should do. Him to whom the prophets looked innocence, and the guilt that oppressed their souls. This expresses the feelings that sinners have when they are convicted of sin. (50)

Thus fulfilled what Jesus spoke: “Howbeit, when he, the Spirit of truth is come, He will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come” (John 16:13).

### **What Happened on that Pentecost**

Let us keep in mind all that happened on Pentecost Day. Moses taught the people how to figure Pentecost.

And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the Sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering, seven Sabbaths shall be complete. Even unto the morrow after the seventh Sabbath shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meat offering unto the Lord. (Lev. 23:15-16)

The word Pentecost means fiftieth day. It is the day we call Sunday and that is how we know the church was established on Sunday. It was at a time when many thousands of Jews had gathered in Jerusalem to observe the feast days. God always plans affairs that work out perfectly.

Many great events occurred on Pentecost. It is the day the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles, according to Acts 2:4. Hence, it is the day on which God saw fit to baptize the apostles with the Holy Spirit. This caused amazement and doubt on the part of the Jews and they asked “What meanneth this?” (v. 12). Of course, some were still skeptical and accused the apostles of being drunk. Peter soon put this accusation to flight, however, and proceeded with his great sermon on the prophets.



Can you imagine what a crowd of people were gathered on that day, Pentecost? Jews from all over the world, out of every nation under heaven, some fifteen to seventeen nationalities: yet every man heard in his own language. Peter, standing with the other apostles spoke to the skeptics who charged them with being drunk with new wine, “. . . [Y]e men of Judea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem; be this known unto you and hearken to my words. For these men are not drunken as ye suppose seeing it is but the third hour of the day” (Acts 2:14-15).

Just think how those Jews, who really wanted to be free of the guilt of killing Jesus, on hearing the evidence Peter and the other apostles relate to them must have felt. No wonder they cried out, “What shall we do?” By the law of Moses they could have been put to death. But the love of God was willing to save them all even though they could have known all of the terrible events in the suffering, death, and burial of Christ if they had read with an open mind the scriptures which told them of these things. They could most certainly have known by now that it was by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God that all of this had come to pass.

Can you imagine the courage of the preacher? It was the first time he had stood before this audience. Now by the Spirit of God he stood there and told them, “[Y]e have taken this man and murdered him.” Perhaps if some of our brethren had been there they would have told the apostles, “Now you better be careful, winners don’t knock and knockers don’t win.” But the boldness of the Spirit came forth from the mouth of Peter and he withheld nothing that was profitable for them. They had seen Jesus work miracles, wonders, and signs. They had seen God confirm the fact that He was indeed His Son (Heb. 2:1-4).

### **The Crucial Question**

It is little wonder that they cried out, “What shall we do?” It is implied, to be saved. That is the first time that question was ever asked. Now, the question is where did Peter get the answer? Those who know the scriptures understand that the Holy Spirit gave the apostles the answers which they needed. They received their

answer from Matthew 28:19-20: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” Or from Mark 16:16: “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned.” Maybe he received Lukes’ statement, “And said, unto them, thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (24:46-47). Now I know where the answer came from. “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38).

We have noticed for the first time the most crucial question has been asked. The next time it is was by Saul of Tarsus. The third time it was asked by the keeper of a prison. Paul and Silas, through no fault of their own, but having delivered a maiden in Philippi of a spirit of divination were in prison because they had by so doing deprived her owner of his income. Paul and Silas were placed in the inner prison, chained and locked in stocks. My, how miserable must have been their position. Yet, both were praying and singing unto God and the prisoners heard them. Suddenly the foundation of the prison was shaken and the doors were all opened and every one’s bands loosed. Can you imagine what would happen in a normal situation when all the prisoners were loosed and the doors of our prisons were opened? The prison keeper thought that would be just what would happen there and was ready to fall on his sword. “But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, ‘Do thyself no harm for we are all here’” (v. 28). What a change took place with the sinner. That is when he sprang in and asked the question, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” There is no indication that he, at the present, was concerned about anyone else. He was interested only in self. So it should be with us. So many today will be heard to say, “If it was good enough for my mother or father, then it is good enough for me.” That reminds me of a story I heard regarding a storekeeper. The young man had become the keeper after his father had died. The father had sold hundreds of yards of dry good, measuring the goods by laying them across two tacks which were

placed on the counter, believing they measured a yard. When the son became owner, he soon discovered that his father had used a false measure. The tacks were only 35 inches apart. Do you think the young man would conclude, "My father was sincere and if I change the measurement he used it will make things look bad for him. After all he used that measurement for years and if it was good enough for him, it's good enough for me." Honesty and sincerity would demand that he make a change immediately. Anyone considering salvation should not rely on what anyone else has done or is doing whether it is a mother, father, husband, wife, or children. The preachers answered his question by saying the following: "They spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washing their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his straightway."

Incidentally, we should notice that it was the same hour of the night when he was baptized into Christ. That ought to take care of the notion that baptism is non-essential.

We might talk to a TV preacher who would tell us there is no reason for one to do anything at all to be saved unless especially if he is one of the predestinated before the beginning of the world by God Himself. If he is one of the chosen there is nothing he can do. If he is not in that number, it is just too bad. Of course, if that is what Peter told them, I must tell them the same thing. If that is what Peter told them that is what you must do. In a service a few months ago, I asked the audience if their preacher had told them what Peter had told those on Pentecost. There were a few denominational preachers present. Only those in the audience who were members of the church raised their hand. In view of the fact that we must stand before the judge of all creation and answer for all that we have preached and all that we have obeyed, I would like to be sure that I have done what the Lord wants me to do!

If we were to question another preacher on the matter, "What must I do to be saved," he might say, "Just hold up your hand and you might fill out a card with your name on it that you are one that has just been saved." Again, if that is what the New Testament preachers told me to preach, I must preach it. If it is what they said

do, then you must do it. We are living in an age when just about everything is being taught for salvation most of which cannot be verified in the scriptures. As I traveled in my car several months ago, I heard one preacher telling people that if they were driving their car they probably would have to put their hand on the radio and ask God to save them. If they would do that, all they would have to do is honk their horn, and God would hear it and know what they wanted.

Well, preacher, why is it that all three accounts of answers being given to the same question are different? Brother N. B. Hardeman uses an illustration regarding this matter that fits so well (179-80). He illustrated it by someone asking, "How far is it from one city to the next?" For example, if one were to ask, "How far is it from Moundsville to Chester, WV?" One might be told it is about 60 miles. So he drives on and stops in Wellsburg and asks, "How far is it to Chester, WV?" The next person would tell him it is about 40 miles. He drives on and stops in Weirton, WV, and asks a third person, "How far is it to Chester, WV?" His answer is, "It is about 20 miles." The person asking the question then turns to his friend and says, "These people must be crazy because they all gave me a different answer." Of course, you see the point. They all gave a correct answer. The driver is at a different point each time he asks the question. That is exactly the situation when the question was asked regarding what one must do to be saved. The jailor was at the 60 mile point. So far as I know, he had never heard of Jesus Christ, or if he had heard of Him, he did not believe what he heard. Therefore the preacher had to begin with the first step. Has not the apostle Paul said, "How shall they call on him whom they have not believed?" (Rom. 10:16). Hence, Peter needed to begin at the very beginning of the trip. The jailor needed to believe, he had repented and was baptized along with all of his straightway.

Well, what about those on Pentecost? The same thing is true of them as was true of the jailor. The fact is they needed not to be told to believe because they had already indicated their belief by the question they asked Peter. They had need only to be informed of steps following. So Peter began at the 40 mile post. He told them

to repent and be baptized and that was exactly what they needed to know.

The question asked by the Pentecostians began with the word *what*. Peter had taught them things they should already have known from their study of the word of God, but prejudice and envy had so blinded their hearts that it took a strong, pointed sermon to open their hearts. They then realized that there was something which they must do. They could not depend on Abraham for the answer. Nor could they depend on Moses, because they had probably already done what he told them to do. The baptism of John was no longer effective. Now they needed a different answer, one that was authorized by Jesus. God had already made it clear: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, hear ye Him" (Matt. 17:5). They were now hearing words which had never been uttered before. Peter told them they had something to do.

### **Imperative and Non-Negotiable**

The command was imperative. It included the strongest word in the English language. It was not, "May I," or "Could I," or "What can I do," but God used strong language which neither they nor we can avoid. How can so many preachers get around it today?

Many folks today talk about "getting religion." Nothing is said in the New Testament about getting anything. Nobody ever did that in Bible times. We can be sure that of all the conversions in the Acts of the Apostles, every last one of them did exactly the same thing. They all **DID** something. Not one single case is said to have done anything but hear, believe, repent, confess, and be baptized. They all did something. They all did the same thing. Take the "do" out of the Bible and you have robbed the pure and undefiled religion of the New Testament of the very foundation upon which it was founded.

The apostle Peter made it clear that there are two parts to do. One is on the part of man; the other is on the part of God. It is both active and passive. Therefore, man's part is "I must do." God's part is "to save." That is why Ananias told Paul to call upon the name of the Lord. God has promised to remember our sins to more.

A good friend of mine went to a funeral of a heathen. The preacher knew the deceased was a heathen. Most assembled knew it. The preacher told the audience that they did not need to worry about where the deceased had gone, because just before he died the preacher had asked him if he believed that Jesus was the Son of God. The deceased whispered, "Yes." "He is in Heaven," said the preacher.

Indeed, there were more promises made. The remission of sins. Some believe that forgiveness of sins comes before one is baptized. They would explain that once a man is saved he will want to be baptized. This is usually referred to as an outward sign of an inward grace. A great controversy exists over this matter. Why? Because of the Greek word *eis*.

Some follow the Baptist scholar A. T. Robertson who, believing that salvation comes before baptism, translates *eis* "because of." That is he appeals to what is called, "causal use of *eis*." His argument goes like this. You put a man in jail for murder. (Not in order that he might commit murder but because he already has.) . . . Let it be known that many lexicons do not even give "causal use of *eis*" (because out of occurrences of *eis* in the New Testament, only 4 might mean "because" and those that do, admit that such a translation is at least controversial. (Reese 76-77)

Another promise of importance is: The gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a person, not an inanimate force. He is not received into the lives of Christians as a result of praying for him. Boles states: "There is a sense in which the Holy Spirit in the 'ordinary measure' dwelt with all Christians; in this measure he dwells with Christians today. In this sense all of the references to the indwelling of the Spirit in Christians find their application" (208).

Verse 39 says, "[F]or the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." In Genesis 12:3, God made a promise unto Abram, "And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth

thee; and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed.” I believe the promise that God made to Abraham differed from the Old Testament law in that only a Jew could be blessed under the law. In the Christian age not any accountable being is excluded. The Great Commission included all nations; every creature. Whosoever will be included for in Revelation 22:17 we read, “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say come. And let him that is athirst come and whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely.” It seems to me that Peter is saying that the promise of salvation shall not be extended to their generation alone, but to the posterity and generation after generation. It will be an act of free choice, for Peter says, “as many as the Lord our God shall call.” How does God do this calling? Paul said, “whereunto he [God] called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess. 2:14). One is not called miraculously, nor is the new birth the baptism of the Holy Spirit, nor by any other means, except by the power of the gospel of Christ.

### **Obey as They Did**

I have no idea how long Peter preached to them on that occasion, but he preached many other words testifying and exhorting them to “Save yourselves from this untoward generation.” The choice was theirs. The preaching directed by the Holy Spirit, had boldly declared them to be murderers of the Messiah. They now needed to separate themselves from those who still were pleased that Christ had been murdered. Do you suppose that Peter might have pointed his finger at those in the audience who had accused them of being drunkards? Possibly so. At any rate all who desire salvation must genuinely repent of their sins. They will no longer want to keep company with the wicked of the world. As new creatures in Christ they will desire the fellowship of those who do not think and act as Christians should. This would be a wonderful time for any in this audience who have never done what Peter told the Pentecostian and do it now. Do not put it off for another day because “today is the day of salvation, now is the accepted time” (2 Cor. 6:26). It may be that you have wandered from the path of righteousness. If

that is the case, please return by confessing your sins to God, repenting of them and let us pray with you that we all may be forgiven of our transgressions.

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### **Biographical Sketch**

Denver E. Cooper was born April 2, 1923, in Cairo, WV. His parents were Jesse and Sarah Cooper. One sister, Doris died in 1931. Donald R. Cooper, brother, now preaches for the church in Mansfield, OH.

Florence Smith became his wife March 25, 1945. Denver and Florence raised nine children, (one adopted). They include, Edward T., who preaches for the Washington Street church in St. Albans, WV; Denver Jr., Kelly R., Timothy, Rebecca Messer, Jesse, Prisca (deceased); Denise Conley whose husband preaches for the Harmar Hill Church of Christ, in Marietta, OH; and Martha Noland, whose husband preaches for the church meeting in Hanoverton, OH.

Denver has served churches throughout the Ohio Valley for 68 years. He now serves as director of West Virginia School of Preaching.

# *The Gospel in Ephesus*

Acts 19

*J. D. Conley*

Once more I regard it an honor to appear on this fine lectureship program. It is my considered opinion that the Victory Lectures are among the best our brotherhood has to offer. The lectureship books that have been produced are a rich blessing to the life of each



**J. D. Conley** in his 18th year preaching full-time, and is in his 7th year with Harmar Hill Church of Christ, Marietta, OH.

Christian who is in possession of them. This book on Acts will be no exception. I extend my sincere appreciation to all of those responsible for planning and hosting this lectureship. May the book, the CD's and the DVD's, enjoy a wide distribution and may the Godhead be immensely glorified this week and always.

## **Introduction**

Ephesus was more of a carnival than a city. The only other metropolis that could compete with its overt carnality was Corinth, its due west neighbor two hundred miles on the other side of the Aegean Sea. In many ways Ephesus and Corinth were like debauched twins, each one challenging the other for the title of "Most Wicked." For the most part, it was a toss up. Without question the Gospel in Ephesus was:

## ***Needed***

Like our modern cities of New York, Las Vegas, New Orleans, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, etc., Ephesus was entertainment crazed. Like much entertainment today, the kind

available in Ephesus was debased. The city was known far and wide for its brothels, theatres, baths, gymnasiums, its stadium and Celsus Library. But its main claim to fame was the temple of Artemis, or Diana, which was the Roman name for the Greek goddess. The temple was known as one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world. The symbol of this temple was the statue of the many-breasted Artemis, which represented fertility, hunting and wild life.

The temple stood on a platform that measured 239 feet wide by 418 feet long. It had 100 columns over fifty-five feet high and exceeding six feet in diameter at the base. . . . The sacred chamber was seventy feet wide and was open toward the sky. On the main altar stood the statue of the goddess Artemis. (Baez-Camargo 245)

Idolatry was big business in Ephesus. Some of the Ephesians were getting rich selling souvenirs (cf. Acts 19:24-27). In fact, the temple of Diana doubled as a bank and was also a depository of valuable works of art. But in addition to their predilection for idolatry was their obsession with magic (19:19). Magic is simply being a natural outgrowth of idolatry, which is believing in the unbelievable. Because Ephesus was a city given over to idolatry, covetousness, occultism, and sexual immorality, it was a city in dire need of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Any of our cities today prove to be a challenge for preachers of the Gospel. Sin is so widespread and so deeply entrenched many preachers become discouraged and surrender. Ephesus proved to be a stiff challenge even for the peerless apostle Paul. He found a lot of opposition to the truth in this hedonistic mecca. Yet, he pressed on never giving away an inch of ground in the process. This Gentile city needed the Gospel and Paul understood that *he* was the one God needed to plant it there.

The first need he met was to further instruct a dozen or so disciples of John to be "*baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus*" (Acts 19:5, emp. added). Upon doing so Paul "laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues,

and prophesied” (Acts 19:6). At this time the baptism of John had been supplanted by the baptism of the Great Commission, i.e., the one baptism mentioned in Ephesians 4:5. Paul was unafraid to fill these twelve men in on what they lacked. Even though they no doubt thought they had, they had not obeyed the truth correctly. They knew some truth concerning baptism, such as the prerequisites of faith and repentance of sins, yet their baptism was still ineffective. Paul tended to this need.

Secondly, Paul moved into less friendly territory when he “went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God” (Acts 19:8). After the need in the synagogue was met, and the Gospel message was received as much as it was going to be, Paul began teaching on a daily basis in the school of Tyrannus. The Divine record states “And this continued by the space of two years” (Acts 19:10). Nothing else is known about this school. Maybe it was a two-year program like WWSOP. Students, imagine sitting at the feet of the matchless apostle Paul for two years! I wonder, did he give much homework?

One ancient manuscript (Bezae) suggests that Paul’s classes were from 11:00 a.m. till 4:00 p.m. In the Middle East this is the time when many take an afternoon rest. The apostle might have used the early morning hours to work at his trade (cf. 20:34). (W. Jackson 249)

But not only did Paul meet the spiritual needs of men and women, he also strove to take care of their physical needs too (cf. Acts 19:11-12). The Gospel then, and now, is triple-pronged. One prong concerns itself with evangelism (Mark 16:15). Another prong, the edification of the saints (Eph. 2:20-22; Jude 20). The remaining prong of the Gospel is benevolence (Gal. 6:10). Christians must give careful attention to all three prongs. We must not be zealous in one to the exclusion of the others. If one spends all of their time helping the needy, but never teaching them the truth, what lasting good is it? On the other hand, if we only teach truth, but do not show it, we violate a host of passages.

Furthermore, if all we do is devote all of our time to building up our brethren, we fail in evangelism and benevolence. A balance needs to be struck. The Gospel in Ephesus by the hand of Paul shows us how to achieve this balance. Luke showed us this balance in the first twelve verses of Acts 19. Edification is seen in the encouragement that he showed the disciples of John to be baptized correctly. He demonstrates evangelism in the synagogue and in the school of Tyrannus. Then Paul practices benevolence in that he was an instrument in healing the sick and those possessed of evil spirits.

In addition to all of these needs being met, Paul also exposed the great need for the people of Ephesus to be people of spiritual discernment. For too long many of them had been duped by the so-called magicians in town. Fake healers are nothing new. They were around then, as they are now, and will continue to be while garnering a following of gullible disciples, regardless of this clear warning of John, “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1).

But whenever and wherever the Gospel is being taught and the real needs of people are being met, Satan will do his best to put a stop to it (cf. Matt. 13, parable of the tares; also 2 Cor. 2:11; 1 Thess. 2:18). Ephesus was one of his favorite playgrounds therefore the Devil was not willing to concede one square inch of it to the Gospel of Christ. But Satan was not tangling with the likes of modern day preachers with their silk suits and smooth speeches (Matt. 11:8; Isa. 30:10), rather he chose to grapple with the battle tested and gritty apostle Paul and the powerful Gospel of Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:16), an unbeatable combination!

Nonetheless, at first, Satan seemed to get a toe hold. Because for a time the Gospel in Ephesus was:

### *Impeded*

Though the events in (Acts 19:13-41) are quite dramatic and even alarming, this impeding of the Gospel turned out to be minor and short-lived. Christians need to be reminded that Satan is a bully who will tuck tail and run when resisted (James 4:7). He

lacks the courage and the fortitude to fight toe to toe. He is, as Peter says, a roaring lion (1 Peter 5:8), but he would rather roar, than fight. He excels at intimidation, but only when allowed. He is primarily prowling around for soft and easy morsels to devour, and has no appetite for a toughened soldier of Christ.

Satan and the enemies of Christ basically engaged in two forays with Paul and the Gospel in Ephesus. The first of which was a complete failure which ended up backfiring on the forces of evil, viz., the seven sons of Sceva debacle (19:13-16). It seems that the miraculous power that Paul demonstrated while in Ephesus was so impressive that it spawned a band of counterfeit miracle workers. In fact this is precisely where many charlatans today got the idea for their prayer clothes, which they will be more than happy to part with for financial gain. “Modern fake healers who mail out ‘prayer clothes’ for monetary considerations have no connection with this genuine biblical phenomenon. Miraculous healing does not occur today” (W. Jackson 249). “It was not even necessary for Paul to be present for a sign to occur. Articles which had merely been touched with Paul could be taken to the sick for their healing. The miracles verified the gospel. . .” (Conley 160).

Among the *vagabond Jews* (19:13), i.e., those Jews who wandered from place to place passing themselves off as exorcists, were seven sons of one called Sceva. Some contend Sceva should have known better since he was a *chief priest* (19:14). But such is debatable. “No Jewish chief priest by this name is known. He may have adopted this title as his own, and had there been such things as quote marks Luke would likely have used them” (Bruce 390).

It seems reasonable, and consistent with Sceva’s audacious nature that if he would pass himself off as the father of seven exorcists, why not a chief priest? But when these brash brothers called on the name of Jesus to give their act an air of authenticity, their plan flopped. It is noteworthy in this humorous account that the demon answered the sons of Sceva by saying, “Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?” (19:15). What a paradox? The demon knew and admitted the Divine while exposing the fraudulent! The theatre-goers in Ephesus must have enjoyed this scene where tragedy and comedy appeared together at the same

time! The man, who was *still* demon possessed, did not take kindly to this outlandish show of pretense and leaped upon these seven sorry sons. He embarrassed them by ripping off their clothes, inflicting bodily harm, causing them to run out of the “house naked and wounded” (19:16). All seven had been exposed spiritually as well as physically. How embarrassing this must have been! It is no surprise that we never read about Mr. Sceva and his boys again.

Seven ordinary men were no match for one demon. But no company of demons (not even several thousand) was the equal of divine power (cf. Mark 5:8ff). The report of this episode-where a demon cast out several men!-became known throughout the city, among both Jews and Greeks. (W. Jackson 250-251)

Not only was the inability of the frauds exposed, this exposure led to mass repentance on the part of those who were honest enough to see that magic was only a word. As we preach the gospel in the Ohio Valley the Lord’s church needs a wholesale return to the Bible, coupled with a wholesale rejection of any kind of material that would lead us away from the word of God and to the mere words of men.

It is indeed a recommended course for all in the kingdom who cannot properly use material other than the Bible, and who thus displace the Bible with what they find elsewhere. All sectarian products and all of human philosophy need to be thus disposed of, if even possessing these works in our libraries will cause our teaching to be flavored by them. (B. Jackson, *Studies* 191-91)

The other foray that presented itself as an impediment to the Gospel in Ephesus was the riot evoked by the silversmith Demetrius (19:23-41). His pocketbook was being pinched so he decided to put pressure on Paul the preacher. Because of the Gospel in Ephesus, Demetrius’ orders for shrines of Diana were shrinking daily. Clearly the Gospel in Ephesus was having a grand

effect (Isa. 55:11; Acts 2:41, 17:6; 1 Cor. 3:6; Col. 1:23)! Doves had turned away from magic and had embraced truth. Idolatry was the next item of business to be addressed. According to Demetrius (19:26), Paul's sermon against idolatry on Mars Hill (cf. Acts 17:22ff), had wafted across the Aegean and was having an impact in how the Ephesians and others in Asia did business. This reminds us that the Gospel is *powerful* and that preaching it *does* make a difference! The Gospel preached was the only thing that could change Ephesus from being the Devil's amusement park. The Gospel of Christ has real transformation power. It remains the only thing that can change our city, our nation and the world as a whole. Preachers especially, let us take a lesson from Paul and preach on the things that need to be preached *when* they need to be preached. We can do nothing but preach truth and still be displeasing to God if we fail to tell a *specific* audience *specific* things. *This*, in and of itself, is an impediment to the advancement of the Gospel! Would God have been pleased if Paul would have preached on any other topic than the one he did in Athens? Paul preached exactly what needed to be preached to that particular audience at that particular time. He could have preached the truth on any number of subjects, and yet if he had shied away from preaching the very sermon he did, about the **Unknown God** and against idolatry, God's spirit would have been *stirred!* Too often preachers are afraid to be specific, Paul never was. His sermons were effective because he addressed the sin at hand. He did not ignore it, brush up against it, make it a side point, or give it a glancing blow. He hit the problem head on! Preachers who do not preach like Paul, though they preach only truth, are essentially preaching irrelevant sermons. What a paradox! They preach only truth, no error, and yet their work is ineffective and fruitless! The Gospel in Athens, Ephesus, and everywhere else it was preached, was making a difference because it was pin pointing sin, not circling it. Because of Paul's specificity with sin, and exposing it to Gospel light, the time he spent in Ephesus culminated in these magnificent words, "So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed" (19:20).

But when the pure Gospel is preached, and sin is exposed by its powerful rays of Divine illumination, many will not take kindly to

it. The citizens of Ephesus were no exception. The Gospel is designed to do one of two things: attract or repel. With the urging of Demetrius, who was stressed about his economic future (cf. 19:24-28), he attracted the repulsed (his co-workers), and worked them up into a wrathful lather over Paul who was hurting their trade. Not only that, but poor Diana's name was being besmirched and her influence threatened to be toppled. Such a scenario was unspeakable, after all, who would the world then worship (19:27)? Old Demetrius was shrewd. His words were pretentious, they were just a guise. What he really was saying was "Who in the world is going to pay me to make shrines of Diana if she is seen for what she really is?" (cf. 1 Tim.6:10). Given his temperament, I wonder if Demetrius was one of those "**beasts**" Paul fought with at Ephesus (1 Cor. 15:32)? According to Bill Jackson, "opposition mounted by those who despise truth can be worse than actually facing a wild beast" (*Commentary* 160).

The reference to fighting with wild beasts at Ephesus should be taken metaphorically. As a Roman citizen, it is unlikely that Paul was forced to fight animals in the arena...Since opponents of God's men are called vipers (Luke.3:7), dogs (Phil.3:2) and swine (Mat.7:6), it would not be unusual for Paul to label them as wild beasts. The Lord's people have always had many animal-like adversaries. (Allen 192)

Something horrifically life threatening had happened to Paul at Ephesus (cf. 2 Cor. 1:8-12). The riot that ensued in Acts 19 does not seem to be a reference to the awful occasion Paul writes about in (2 Cor. 1:8ff.). Other than this allusion we have no definite information about this terrible experience. Be that as it may, Demetrius being one of the *beasts* of 1 Corinthians 15:32 is still plausible. Whether the riot of Acts 19 is what Paul is hearkening back to in 2 Corinthians 8, or another incident altogether, the Gospel in Ephesus was impeded.

Demetrius, who made "no small stir about that way" (Christianity is referred to as "the Way" several times in Acts,



16:17; 18:25, 26; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22), saw to it that Paul and his companions were mobbed and pushed into the direction of the theatre.

This is the most magnificent structure in Ephesus. The Great Theatre is located on the slope of Panayir Hill, opposite Harbor Street, and easily seen when entering from the south entrance to Ephesus. It was first constructed in the Hellenistic Period, in the third century BC. It is the largest in Anatolia and has the capacity for 25,000 seats, sixty-six rows. The stage building is three-storied and 18 meters high. The facade facing the audience was ornamented with relieves, columns with niches, windows and statues.

There are five doors opening to the orchestra area. . . . The theatre was used not only for concerts and plays, but also for religious, political and philosophical discussions and for gladiator and animal fights. (“Ephesus”)

From this point things got out of control. The Gospel in Ephesus was impeded, but had Demetrius and others had their way it would have been completely expelled. But Demetrius was not the one in charge. God was (Dan. 2:21; Acts 5:38-39; Rom. 8:31). This reminds us that when things appear hopeless and out of control, God still is in control (Heb. 1:3; 6:19). Paul being the fearless preacher that he was desired to be brought into the great theatre. He wanted all of Ephesus to hear the Gospel. He wanted those 25,000 seats filled to capacity with standing room only. But both the disciples and the city officials deemed it would be hazardous for Paul to go in. Inside the theatre was complete chaos, and most did not know why they were even there (19:32). Though the gospel was needed, it was not an ideal time for Paul to deliver a sermon. There does come a time when a defense for the Gospel needs to be made; this is required (cf. Rom.1:16; Philip. 1:17; Jude 3, etc). But God does not require rash action on our part to unnecessarily put our lives in jeopardy when it would be to no avail. Such seems to have been the case with Paul in this instant. At first it seems that

no one could get control of the crowd. A Jew named Alexander tried, and evidently made a firm attempt to make sure the mob knew that the Jews were not in agreement with the Christians. They did not want to get blamed for what Paul had been doing. Instead, they were compromisers who sold out to the economic and social pressures idolatry was putting on the city. Thus the Jews, in spite of their long exilic history for their love for idols, were *still* soft when it came to this issue!

The crowd paid Alexander no mind. His pitiful defense was drowned out by the crowd’s constant silly chant whichh droned on for two hours, “Great is Diana of the Ephesians!” It appears Demetrius and the others needed all the false assurance they could muster. But a lie is still a lie, no matter how often it is emphatically repeated.

It was only when the town clerk interceded that things began to simmer down. “The town clerk was the most important local official, the liaison between the local government and the imperial Roman authorities” (Conley 162).

This is evidently the speech of a man well skilled in the management of popular assemblies. It is probable that the speaker . . . was a friend of the apostle, and a man of too much intelligence to receive with blind credulity the popular delusion in reference to the temple and image of Diana. The speech, indeed, has a ring of insincerity about it, indicating that the speaker was merely humoring the popular superstition for the special purpose that was before him. (McGarvey 240)

Whether the town clerk was a advocate of Diana or not, he did succeed in appeasing and dispersing the mob, thus restoring order to what could have been a disastrous event.

He convinced the troublemakers that Paul had done nothing against the law, and that if Demetrius and his cohorts wanted to pursue the matter, it needed to be brought to the attention of the courts. The town clerk also intimated that if the unlawful uproar should come to Rome’s attention, Ephesus could suffer

reparations. This event in Ephesus reminds us that when the Gospel is preached there will always be a reaction to it. It may not be the kind of reaction desired, but the Gospel *will* receive a reaction, either compelling or repelling.

Though the Gospel in Ephesus was impeded, it also:

### ***Succeeded***

Its success is seen in a variety of ways. On Paul's second missionary journey is when he first came to Ephesus. After leaving Aquila and Priscilla there, he "entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews. When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not" (Acts 18:19-20). Evidently Paul was having *some success* in teaching the Jews the Gospel.

The Gospel also enjoyed success in Ephesus because of the efforts of Aquila and Priscilla, who taught the skilled orator Apollos, (who had come to Ephesus via Alexandria), "the way of God more perfectly" (18:26). Apollos in turn "mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, showing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ" (18:28).

Timothy also preached the Gospel, and nothing but the Gospel in Ephesus, according to 1 Timothy 1:3.

As we have studied, Paul then returned to Ephesus on his third missionary journey and the Gospel enjoyed the success previously pointed out, viz. the correct baptism of John's disciples, and his tireless efforts in the synagogue with the stubborn Jews, which resulted in the "persuading of the things concerning the kingdom of God" (19:8). Plus his two year stint as a faculty member in the school of Tyrannus. Luke records that because of what Paul did in this school, "all they that which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks" (19:10).

Then the Gospel enjoyed success in that it exposed the fake healers that were preying on the unsuspecting Ephesians. There was no comparison between the marvelous miracles Paul performed and the pathetic imitations others tried to pass off. The spurious spectacle of the Sceva Seven had been published so widely that it "was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus" (19:17). Not only this but:

[F]ear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. And many that believed came, and confessed, and showed their deeds. Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed. (19:17-20)

Without dispute, the Gospel *succeeded* in Ephesus! "When the value of the books was computed, it amounted to what would be about \$35,000 in today's U.S. currency" (Polhill 406). "Repentance is not cheap! Significantly, they did not attempt to merely go out of business by selling their inventory (where it could be used again); they destroyed the goods" (W. Jackson 251).

The Ephesians had more spiritual advantages afforded to them, (and perhaps needed them more), than any other city we read about in the New Testament. The church located there was *extremely* blessed. It is the only church in the New Testament which has two letters addressed to it by two apostles, Paul (Ephesians) and John, (cf. Rev. 2:1-7). Though John wrote Revelation, the letter he records in (Rev. 2:1-7) are none other than the sobering words of the Lord. If early church historians are correct, Ephesus also enjoyed the added perk of John residing there later in life. When we take into consideration all of these advantages, coupled with the fact that Paul preached there for three years (20:31) and delivered a very personal sermon to the Ephesian eldership gathered at Miletus (20:17-38), we conclude it was both a church and a city that basked in the success of the Gospel. All who are privileged to serve as elders should have Acts 20:17-38 as required reading. If elders today would "*take heed*" to the things Paul said to that early eldership, the Lord's church today would be far better off than she is, and the Gospel would be having more success than it is having.

But because so many elderships are caving into the dictates of culture instead of standing for Christ, and because hearts once aflame have cooled, the Gospel that was once successful in Ephesus, and even in our cities has now:

### **Receded**

Some of the saddest words in all of the Bible are said about the once thriving and successful church at Ephesus. The very church that enabled Paul to write the Everest of his epistles beginning with this commendation, “to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 1:1). Yet, later on, that sentiment of Paul’s was downgraded by our Lord to this, “Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love” (Rev. 2:4). What caused this spiritual slippage and what does this accusation by our Lord mean? Even though these words were preceded with words of commendation there was something terribly wrong with the Ephesus congregation. “On the heels of these words of praise . . . these words almost seem a contradiction” (G. West 138).

They were doing many things right, they exposed those claiming to be apostles (v. 2). They were patient and steadfast in their work (v. 3). They too shared a mutual hatred with the Lord for the deeds of the Nicolaitans (v. 6). Still the Lord issued this startling edict, “Nevertheless, I have *somewhat* against thee” (Rev. 2:4, emp. added). The *somewhat* Jesus goes on to reveal, is that *somehow*, they had left their first love. I do not believe this was a deliberate act on their part. It was perhaps a departure that was so gradual they were completely unaware of it. Ironically, it was an act of love on the part of Jesus, to point out they had left their first love! It was because they had left their first love that the Gospel began to recede in Ephesus. How many congregations in the Ohio Valley could Jesus so charge?

They have left their first love. “Ichabod” (“the glory is departed,”<sup>1</sup> Samuel 4:21) could almost be written over their door. The church at Ephesus had left its first love. The members no longer sang as they used to sing. They no longer contributed as they did in the early years of their Christian life. They didn’t read the Bible as they used to. They didn’t pray as they did when they were first Christians. That truly is the tragedy of tragedies. (W. West 38-39)

This church . . . was in a religious rut. There was no heart centered love for the Lord. What was being done was not done out of deep love for the Lord because they had left their first love. (Pugh 3)

Christians today should give *careful* attention that they not leave their first love. If the Ephesians given all their advantages could do so, then so can we. Jesus lovingly sent them a wake up call, they needed it. Various churches in this very valley need one as well.

### **Conclusion**

Not all that long ago, this beautiful river valley saw the launch of the Restoration Movement on American soil. For over a century this part of the country has been a spiritual bastion for the Gospel of Christ. Like Ephesus, the rugged people of Appalachia *needed* the Gospel. In spite of countless *impediments* the Gospel took hold and spread. The Gospel enjoyed great *success* for many years, but now it seems to be *receding*. May the churches in the Ohio Valley learn a lesson from the church in Ephesus, and not let the Gospel recede here, as it did there. Stay wedded to your first love enabling the **“Word of God to grow mightily and prevail!”**

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### **Biographical Sketch**

J. D. Conley was born in El Paso, TX, in 1959. He is a third generation Gospel preacher and is in his 18th year of preaching full-time. He majored in Bible at Freed-Hardeman University and is a graduate of the Brown Trail School of Preaching in Fort Worth, TX. He has had three local works, two in WV, and is in his seventh year working with the Harmar Hill Church of Christ, Marietta, OH, where he also serves as one of the elders. He has been married to the former Denise Cooper for 31 years, they have six children.

# The Use of the Scriptures in Acts

W. Terry Varner

Our lesson for this hour is “The Use of Scriptures in Acts.” This is a worthy study in and of itself. Acts is part of the entire “oracles of God” (1 Peter 4:11). Our study will discuss the following: (1) What is the meaning of the term Scripture? (2) Acts of Apostles as



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Scripture. (3) The use (purpose) of Acts of Apostles as Scripture.

It is always important to define the terms of one’s study and follow the principle set forth by Marsh, “Define your terms and then keep to the terms defined” (1). By the term “use,” Webster defines as: “1a: the act or practice of using something. . . d: the method or manner of using something...2a (1): habitual or customary practice. . . 7: a part of a sermon on which a doctrine is applied to life” (2523).

The phrase “the Scriptures in Acts” is used in the sense of Old Testament references, the Apostolic Letter written by “the apostles and elders and brethren” (Acts 15:23-29). It also refers to the oral teaching in Acts.

## What is the meaning of the term Scripture?

The Scripture (*graphie*) simply means *writing* when “used by the Greek authors; but in the N.T. it always refers to the Holy Scriptures” (Parkhurst 112). The term Scripture is descriptive of our understanding the Bible as the word of God. Sometimes the Bible is referred to as (1) *Scripture* (singular) in Acts 8:32, 35; Galatians 3:8, 22; and 2 Timothy 3:16, and (2) *Scriptures* (plural) in John 5:39 and 1 Corinthians 15:3-4.

The Bible uses various terms, in part or in whole, in referring to itself; i.e. “the oracles of God” (Rom. 3:2; 1 Peter 4:11); the “Word” (Matt. 4:4); “the truth” (John 8:32; 17:17); the “Law” in (John 10:34; 12:34; 15:25; 1 Cor. 14:21 et al).

To help distinguish between the writings of God and the writings of mere man, inspiration, at times, adds the word *Holy* before *Scriptures* as in, “Which He had promised afore by His prophets in the *holy scriptures*” (Rom. 1:2, emp. added) and “And from a child you have known the *holy scriptures*” (2 Tim. 3:15, emp. added). Holy (*hagios*) carries the meaning of “religious awe, to venerate, sacred” (Abbott-Smith 5).

The Holy Scriptures are given man “by inspiration of God” (2 Tim. 3:16); therefore, are considered as separate and distinct from the writings of men. The *source* of the Scripture is God thereby making the Scriptures *holy* as they come from God who is “holy” (1 Peter 1:16). They are the *very* words of God because they originate from the Holy Spirit/God (1 Cor. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21). They are not the words of men (1 Cor. 2:13; 1 Thess. 2:13).

The above is important. The Bible is the Word of God and nothing less! What an individual believes the Bible teaches is determined by what an individual believes is the Bible’s source. This is all-important, as we can know Christ and Christianity *only* from the Bible. This principle is true when we consider the words of Friedman:

People have been reading the Bible for nearly two thousand years. . . . They have regarded it as divinely dictated, revealed, or inspired, or as a human creation. They have acquired more copies of it than any other book. It is quoted (and misquoted) more often than other books. . . . It is at the heart of Christianity and Judaism. . . . People read it, study it, admire it, disdain it, write about it, argue about it, and love it. People have lived by it and died for it. *And we do not know who wrote it. . . . It is a strange fact that we have never known with certainty who produced the book*

*that has played such a central role in our civilization.* (15, emp. added)

Consider further the following comment by James D. Smart, late Professor of Biblical Interpretation, at Union Theological Seminary, New York. Smart, who was a theological liberal and who did not believe in verbal, plenary inspiration, laments that the Bible is read, preached, and studied so little by Christians; it has resulted in the Bible becoming a closed book for many.

But what meets our eyes is the puzzling and embarrassing phenomenon that the century in which the investigation of the Bible has been prosecuted more scientifically, more vigorously, and with an international cooperation of scholars, has witness *a steady recession of the Bible from the preaching of the church and from the consciousness of the Christian people.* (31, emp. added)

Really? Wonder why? Have neither Friedman nor Smart taken seriously the Bible's claim that it is *the Holy Scriptures*? God has always expected man to read and understand the Bible. He warns, "He who answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame to him" (Prov. 18:13). Isaiah predicted men would hear but not understand, "Hearing you will hear and shall not understand. . . . For the [their] hearts . . . have grown dull. . . . Lest they should understand with their heart" (Isa. 6:9-10). Jesus asked, "Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word" (John 8:43). Jesus warned, "Take heed *how* you hear" (Luke 8:18, emp. added); "Take heed *what* you hear" (Mark 4:24, emp. added); and "He who has ears to hear, let him hear" (Matt. 13:9). Philip asked the eunuch, "Do you understand what you are reading?" (Acts 8:30). Paul affirmed man's ability (cf. John 7:17), "When you read, you may understand" (Eph. 3:4).

If Friedman, Smart, and others understood the source, authority, and inerrancy of the Bible, they would quickly believe and teach other than what they affirm in the above quotes. Society would be a different society. Scholarship supposedly opened the Scriptures

to where the Scriptures can be understood correctly; however, modern scholarship has done more to close the Scriptures, as the very word of God, than to open them! It is important to understand that right doctrine produces valid living or experiences; whereas, wrong doctrine produces deceptive living or experiences. Jividen states it this way: "A person's view of the Scriptures, more than any other thing, determines his faith and practice" (12).

### **Acts of Apostles as Scripture**

Acts of Apostles is one of the longest books in the New Testament containing 1,003 verses as compared to 1,157 verse in the Gospel of Luke, its companion volume, and 1,071 verses in the Gospel of Matthew. Witherington claims, "Acts has 18,374 words" (qtd. in Bock 6). While various suggestions have been given for the theme of Acts, we suggest the theme, "Jesus, the Lord of all for a Gospel sent to and for all."

In examining Acts as Scripture; i.e. the inspired word of God (2 Tim. 3:16), we look briefly at the follow areas.

*Old Testament quotations in Acts of the Apostles.* Old Testament quotations in the New Testament are abundant and Acts contains its fair share. The quotations from the Greek Old Testament, or Septuagint (LXX), will vary in count according to *how* the lists are compiled, as is evident from the following. Angus lists the LXX "quotations" in the New Testament as follows: (1) "direct quotations" number 263 and (2) "less direct" quotations as 376, totaling 639 (249). In Acts, he lists 31 direct quotations and 21 references from the LXX, totaling 52 (249). Aebi lists 21 quotations of prophecy from the LXX fulfilled in Acts (38). Archer and Chirichigno lists in Acts, 35 direct quotations from the LXX (xx). The United Bible Societies fourth revised edition of *The Greek New Testament* lists 40 quotations in Acts (Aland 889).

Many Old Testament quotations used in the New Testament are not always quoted literally as seen in Angus above. The Greek Old Testament "was virtually the only form of the Old Testament in the hands of Jewish believers outside of Palestine, and it was certainly the only available form for Gentile converts to the Jewish faith or Christian faith" (Archer and Chirichigno ix).

Because of the occasional inexactness of the LXX quotations, it “often seems contrary to their original import and purpose” (Aebi 1). However, Aebi correctly argues that the LXX “has been transmitted to us in substantially its original form” and results in “the infallible authority of the Scriptures” (6). Some scholars wrongly conclude the New Testament authors were faulty and errant resulting in an uninspired and untrustworthy New Testament. If the Bible is the very word of God, and it is, it is both inspired and inerrant when translated correctly. Jesus said the apostles would be guided “into all truth” by the Holy Spirit (John 16:13). The following quote argues for the New Testament writers being divinely guided: “Christ’s chosen spokesmen were like Him guided to expound the Old Testament Scriptures ‘with authority, and not as the scribes’” (Archer and Chirichigno xii).

Inspiration of the Old Testament included both oral and written words of God’s servants. “These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel. So Moses . . . laid before them all these words which the LORD commanded him” (Ex. 19:6-7). God said to Moses, “Write this for a memorial in the book and recount it in the hearing of Joshua” (Ex. 17:14). “The Spirit of the LORD spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue” (2 Sam. 23:2). The Holy Spirit gave the divine message by placing it in the mouth and on the pens of His spokesmen. In the Old Testament various expressions such as, “[T]he mouth of the LORD has spoken” (Isa. 1:18); “I have put My words in your mouth” (Jer. 1:9); “[Y]ou shall speak My words to them” (Ezek. 2:7); etc., clearly shows the inspiration of the speakers and writers. Paché claims “3,808 times” these and like phrases are used in the Old Testament declaring they convey the express words of God (81).

*The Apostolic letter to the Gentiles.* Acts 15:23-29 is the earliest inspired New Testament writing. Once Gentiles entered the church (Acts 10), a problem arose with some Christians in Jerusalem. Peter’s rehearsal of Cornelius’ conversion was met with the charge, “You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them” (Acts 11:4). These Judaizing Christians later came to Antioch teaching, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of

Moses, you cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1). The apostles and elders in Jerusalem met to resolve the matter. The four speeches in this meeting showed, “the will of God so clear that the opposition was totally silenced, and the only remaining question was, how best to carry out the proposal submitted by James” (McGarvey 68).

The Apostolic Letter written in the name of “the apostles and elders, with the whole church” (15:22, 23) was inspired by the Holy Spirit, “For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit” (15:28). It is called an “epistle” (KJV) and “letter” (15:30, NKJV). It was sent to “the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia” (15:23), with worthy witnesses on their behalf (15:22, 32). The Letter was inspired and authoritative. Luke included the Letter when he penned Acts. It resolved the problem before it destroyed the affected churches. The brief letter when written was Scripture, and was as binding initially as when Luke included it in his inspired history of the early church. It is as binding today as then. It is Scripture.

*Oral teachings in Acts of Apostles.* The Bible teaches that when Peter, Paul, and others spoke orally their words were inspired. This involves verbal (word) and plenary (all) inspiration.

Inspiration (*theopneustos*) does not mean, “breathed into by God . . . but that *it is breathed out by God*” (Warfield 133, emp. added). A classic text on inspiration of the Old Testament, but in principle applicable to all New Testament writers; TCNT is 2 Peter 1:21, “holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.” The text summarizes as follows: *First*, “**men spoke**” refers to human language at a particular time and place. It does not refer to writing and writing instruments, but to their words. On the day of Pentecost following the baptism of the Holy Spirit on the apostles, it was the Holy Spirit who “gave them [apostles] utterance” (Acts 2:4).

*Second*, the men who spoke did not speak from the standpoint of man, but from the standpoint “**of God**” or “**from God**” (ASV); i.e. the divine message has its source with God, not man, and being from Him making the product God’s Word and not their word. Paul writes, “These things we also speak, not in words which

man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches" (1 Cor. 2:13).

*Third*, the men were "**moved by the Holy Spirit**" was the *method* by which God made known His divine message. The Holy Spirit "moved," "carried" (Moffatt), or "impelled" (NEB) them. Paul wrote "according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you" (2 Peter 3:15). These writings were called "the other Scriptures" (2 Peter 3:16).

In that the writers of the New Testament wrote by inspiration or guidance of the Holy Spirit, the question is **HOW** did the apostles receive the divine message from the Holy Spirit? The answer is the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Jesus gives five purposes for the baptism of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles in revealing His will (There are other purposes of Holy Spirit baptism).

- "[T]he Holy Spirit . . . will *teach you all things*" (John 14:26, emp. added).
- "[T]he Holy Spirit . . . [will] *bring to your remembrance all things that I have said to you*" (John 14:26, emp. added).
- "[T]he Spirit of truth . . . will *testify of Me. And you also will bear witness*" (John 15:26-27, emp. added).
- "[T]he Spirit of truth . . . will *guide you into all truth*" (John 16:13, emp. added).
- "[T]he Spirit of truth . . . will *tell you of things to come*" (John 16:13, emp. added).

The baptism of the Holy Spirit fell upon the apostles on the first Pentecost following the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 2:1ff.). The five purposes of Holy Spirit baptism on the apostles empowered and enabled them both to speak and to write the divine message resulting in an inspired, inerrant, and trustworthy message. This is *why* Paul writes, "These things *we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches*" (1 Cor. 2:13, emp. added) and "All Scripture . . . is profitable for doctrine,

for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16).

While the apostles were baptized with the Holy Spirit, **HOW** do we account for an inspired message and writings of those not apostles; e.g. Mark, Luke, James, and Jude? The answer is simple. The apostles laid their hands on them imparting the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 8:14-24; 1 Tim. 4:14; 1:8; 2 Tim. 1:6). Maier writes of the purpose of inspiration as follows:

The purpose of inspiration is to vouchsafe the reliability of statements that come from God (2 Pe 1:21) and to assure that they endure for the future (cf. Isa 40:8; Mt 5:18; 24:35). An inspiration that extends only to the concrete person and not to the message permits the message to sink into oblivion. The 'absolute' would then have disappeared. (111)

The speakers and author, Luke, used Old Testament quotations to show that Jesus fulfilled the Messianic prophecies of God's scheme of redemption. Luke included the inspired "Apostolic Letter" (Acts 15:23-29) in his inspired book. The baptism of the Holy Spirit on the apostles (Acts 2) and the laying on of their hands to impart miraculous gifts to the non-apostles (Acts 8) resulted in both the oral and written texts as the inspired Word of God, the Scriptures. The divine message was inspired, authoritative, inerrant, and trustworthy in all areas. Acts is the *only* inspired history of the Lord's church.

### **The use (purpose) of Acts of Apostles as Scripture**

What is the use (purpose) of Acts as Scripture? J. W. Roberts, the late Professor of Bible and Greek, Abilene Christian University, writes, "The Book of Acts is the capstone of the New Testament. . . . [I]t caps the arch formed by the four Gospels on the one side and the epistles on the other. . . . [W]ithout it we would be completely in the dark as to beginning and development of the early church" (173). In speaking of Acts 2, James D. Bales, the late Professor of Christian Doctrine, Harding University, writes:



Acts two is one of the most significant chapters in the Bible. It relates to much that had gone before and it bears some relationship to all that follows after. . . . It not only marks the fulfillment, or the beginning of the fulfillment, of many prophecies but it also marks the beginning of the reign of Jesus as Lord and Christ at God's right hand. Thus it marks the time of the establishment of the church. (4)

In this section of the use or purpose of Acts as Scripture, we will briefly examine the following. Acts shows: (1) God's redemptive work to all mankind, (2) is the only inspired history of the establishment and beginning of the church, and (3) is accurate and trustworthy.

*God's redemptive work to all mankind.* We list, from our understanding, the primary purpose of Acts was to set forth God's scheme of redemption to all mankind. Not only are there listed various conversions to Jesus, thereby giving a divine pattern of *how* to become a Christian, but Acts sets forth Jesus as, "Prince and Savior" (Acts 5:31; 13:23). God's redemptive work began in Jerusalem and spread throughout "all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Acts 1:8 repeats the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; and Luke 24:46-48. Ferguson describes Jesus' redemptive work as:

The redemptive work of Jesus is the source of the church and its ministry. . . . Not only Jesus' death and resurrection but also [H]is total earthly ministry formed part of [H]is mission of salvation. . . . Jesus' mission was redemptive. His atoning death was a unique and unrepeatable work for human salvation. Jesus' sacrificial death, therefore, was a ministry that the church cannot continue. . . . Jesus' redemptive sufferings were complete and cannot be added to. (281-82)

*The only inspired history of the church.* Through the centuries, men have written histories of the church, but none is inspired. Acts gives us Luke's inspired work showing the establishment of the

church, as predicted by Jesus (Matt. 16:18), in Jerusalem on the first Pentecost following the resurrection of Christ (Acts 2) and continuing to the imperial city of Rome (Acts 28).

*Acts is accurate and trustworthy.* Acts is an inspired, accurate history of God's people—Christians—and the spread of Christianity. Many scholars challenge the historical value of the book. Haenchen, a typical liberal, gives an extensive survey of the historical and critical research of Acts concluding that Luke did not write an accurate history and was attempting only to edify the church (14-50). "Acts takes us on a conducted tour of the Graeco-Roman world. The detail is so interwoven with the narrative of the mission as to be inseparable. . . . For Acts the conformation of historicity is overwhelming" (Sherwin-White 122, 189). Several men have demonstrated the historicity of Acts, in various ways, as well as its companion volume, the Gospel of Luke.

Lord George Lyttleton (1709-1773) was a voluminous author and statesman. He was also an infidel and by his own admission, he had a superficial view of Christianity and the Scriptures. Initially, Lyttleton desired to help the philosophical community to overthrow Christianity and the trustworthiness of the Bible. Persuaded that Christianity was not true and the Bible not trustworthy, Lyttleton researched the accounts of Paul's conversion in Acts. His study resulted in believing the accuracy of Paul's conversion as recorded in Acts and that Paul had seen the risen Christ. Consequently, following his yearlong study he converted from infidelity to a believer in God, Christianity, and the Bible.

His argument is simple. Lyttleton knew that men became imposters by desiring to advance themselves with fanciful stories and to satisfy other personal passions. He believed that the story of Christianity and the conversion of the apostle Paul were no different. But he discovered otherwise. His work remains a valuable resource in the field of Christian evidences, especially in the conversion of Paul. Both Dr. Johnson and John Leland gave high testimony to the benefit of Lyttleton's work. Dr. Johnson characterized his work on the apostle as "a treatise to which infidelity has never been able to fabricate a special answer" (qtd. in Jackson 100). John Leland, in his work titled, *Deistical Writers*,

said Lyttleton's work was "a demonstration sufficient to prove Christianity to be a divine revelation" (qtd. in Schaff 1378). Lyttleton acknowledges difficulties in study and encourages the student as follows:

Some difficulties occur in that revelation which human reason can hardly clear; but as the truth of it stands upon evidence so strong and convincing that it cannot be denied without much greater difficulties than those that attend the belief of it, as I have before endeavored to prove. . . . If the external evidence be convincingly strong, and there is no internal proof of its falsehood . . . then surely no difficulties ought to prevent our giving full assent and belief to it. . . . [I]t is no less our duty to acquiesce with humility, and believe that to be right which we know is above us, and belonging to a wisdom superior to ours. (121-22, 123)

William Paley (1743-1805) in defense of the historicity of Acts approached the topic from the "undesigned coincidences" between Acts and Paul's Epistles. He argued for the complete harmony between the two (169-247).

Luke was a medical doctor (Col. 4:14) and used various known medical terms in both of his volumes. William Kirk Hobart lists 161 Greek medical words in the Gospel of Luke and 106 Greek medical words verifying the medical accuracy of Luke's writings. These words were appropriate medical terms known in his time. Hobart's conclusion is:

[A]cquainted with the language of the Greek Medical Schools. . . . [T]he prevailing tinge of medication diction in the third Gospel and in Acts of the Apostles tends also to establish the *integrity* of these writings as we have them, . . . [They] show the hand of a medical author continuously from the first verse of the Gospel to the last verse of the Acts of the Apostles" (xxix, xxxvi)

Acts 27 describes Paul's famous shipwreck at the isle of Melita or Malta. James Smith, both a yachtsman with over 30 years experience and a geologist, researched the voyage and shipwreck of Paul. Residing a winter in Malta allowed him "personal examination of the location" (xi). Smith discusses the navigation, soundings, maps, geography, museums, libraries, etc. to write his work. He concludes that Acts 27 is consistent in all areas and it could not be written "in all its parts, unless from actual observation" (xix).

Sir William Ramsay, "probably the greatest authority on the life of St. Paul, and the writings of St. Luke, in modern times" (W. Smith 144), was trained in the German higher criticism school in the mid-1800s. A skeptic concerning Acts as a product of the first century and Luke as its author, Ramsay was determined to confirm his beliefs further. His research led him to demonstrate Luke's fastidious accuracy in Roman and Greek nomenclature, geography, archaeology, antiquities, etc. Consequently, Ramsay converted from skepticism to a believer because of the accuracy and the historicity of Acts. He wrote several outstanding volumes resulting from his years of research and still worthy of consulting. Ramsay not only lectured at various European universities, but also at Harvard University, John Hopkins University, and Union Seminary in New York. These lectures are printed in his book, *St. Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen*. In 1894, Ramsay delivered these as the Morgan Lectures and again in 1895 as the Mansfield College Lectures. Some one hundred sixteen years ago, he related the following story of his conversion from skepticism to a firm belief in the accuracy and historicity of Acts.

I may fairly claim to have entered on this investigation without any prejudice in favour of the conclusion which I shall now attempt to justify to the reader. On the contrary, I began with a mind unfavourable to it, for the ingenuity and apparent completeness of the Tübingen theory had at one time quite convinced me. It did not lie then in my line of life to investigate the subject minutely; but more recently I found myself often brought in contact with the books of

Acts as an authority for the topography, antiquities, and society of Asia Minor. It was gradually borne in upon me that in various details the narrative showed marvellous truth. In fact, beginning with the fixed idea that the work was essentially a second-century composition, and never relying on its evidence as trustworthy for first-century conditions, I gradually came to find it a useful ally in some obscure and difficult investigations. (7-8)

### Concluding thoughts

Acts is Scripture. Acts is useful. We have desired to set forth with clarity that Acts is inspired and inerrant (trustworthy). The purposes of Acts are numerous; we have discussed only three areas. *First*, Acts sets forth God's redemption available to and for man. *Second*, Acts is the only inspired history of the establishment and spread of Christianity from the first Pentecost following the resurrection of Jesus to the end of Paul's ministry, ca. AD 66. *Third*, Acts is accurate and trustworthy. On this latter point, we have given evidence from the writings of several men, some whose research resulted in their conversion from infidelity and skepticism to believers in God and Christianity.

Luke penned both the Gospel and Acts to his friend Theophilus (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1). It is our position that Luke's carefulness in writing the Gospel continues in his writing of Acts. Such is the argument of many scholars, "The majority view is, in fact, that Luke 1:1-4 is a preface to both gospel and Acts as two parts of a single work" (Higgins 79). Pugh states the preface to his gospel argues for "the claim of the Christian religion rests not upon events which affected merely a private few, but *many*. . . . NO OTHER RELIGION HAS THIS EVIDENCE OF HISTORICAL PUBLICITY AS DOES CHRISTIANITY" (27). We ask why? "The reason? Its ultimate greatness and endurance is realized in the fact that it is Scripture (cf. 1 Tim. 5:18; Luke 10:7)" (25).

Scott made an excellent statement with which to close that serves to substantiate "The Use of the Scriptures in Acts." "*Christianity is a religion of fact; that it rests upon incontrovertible facts—facts*

*attested by the very best and most reliable historic testimony in existence"* (xvi).

No wonder Luke said to his friend, "I . . . after carefully going over the whole story from the beginning, have decided to write an ordered account for you, Theophilus, so that your Excellency may learn how well founded the teaching is that you have received" (Luke 1:3-4, Jerusalem Bible). Amen!

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### Biographical Sketch

W. Terry Varner has been preaching for more than 55 years and has served congregations in Shadyside, OH; Dunbar, WV; North Canton, OH; and Harmar Hill, OH. He presently serves as an elder and evangelist with the congregation in West Union, WV.

He and his wife of over 50 years, Lillie, are the parents of four children: Steve, who is a Mortician at Master's Funeral Home, Mannington, OH; Scott, Administrator of Vocational Schools, Marshall County, Moundsville, WV, and is in his 20<sup>th</sup> year as WV Delegate.; Stuart, one of the Dean of Students, Harding University,

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Terry is one of the four founders of West Virginia School of Preaching and presently teaches 3 classes. He also serves as Research Coordinator for Warren Christian Apologetics Center, Vienna, WV.

Terry presently has 30 iris on the international market, and enjoys library research, building a library, gardening, hunting, and fishing.

# Paul's Case for Christianity

Charles C. Pugh III

The conversion of Saul of Tarsus provides an unanswerable argument for Christianity. Charles R. Erdman says, "The conversion of Saul of Tarsus . . . forms, indeed, one of the strongest arguments in support of belief in . . . the resurrection of



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Jesus Christ" (100). This affirmation that the conversion of Saul (Paul) "forms one of the strongest arguments" in support of the historic resurrection of Jesus and, as a result, is itself proof of the Christian faith was the thesis of George Lyttleton in his classic volume on the conversion of Paul first published anonymously in 1747 when Lyttleton was thirty-eight years of age. Lyttleton was educated at Oxford, entered Parliament, and advanced to the position of lord, commissioner of the treasury. He admitted there were those who tried to shake his faith in the Christian religion, and T. T. Biddolph said that he, along with Gilbert West, had imbibed the principle of skepticism (Campbell 353-54). However, Lyttleton examined the reality of Christianity, and he deserted his unbelief because of a thorough examination which terminated in the production of his well-known dissertation on Saul's conversion (Mitchell 341-42).

Writing to Gilbert West, Lyttleton addressed his apologetical work on the conversion and apostleship of Paul. The opening words read as follows:

Sir,

In a late conversation we had together upon the subject of the Christian religion, I told you, that besides all the proofs of it which may be drawn from the prophecies of the *Old Testament*, from the necessary connection it has with the whole system of the *Jewish* religion, from the miracles of *Christ*, and from the evidence given of his resurrection by all the other Apostles; I thought the conversion and the Apostleship of *St. Paul* alone, duly considered, was of itself a demonstration sufficient to prove Christianity to be a Divine Revelation. (1-2)

More recently, in his book, *There Is a God*, the late atheist-turned-theist, Antony Flew, wrote a fascinating record of how he changed his position on the greatest of all questions—Does God exist? He also addressed the question of whether God has provided any special revelation for humans. He wrote:

Where do I go from here? . . . I am entirely open to learning more about the divine Reality. . . . [T]he question of whether the Divine has revealed itself in human history remains a valid topic of discussion. You cannot limit the possibilities of omnipotence except to produce the logically impossible. Everything else is open to omnipotence. . . . In both my antitheological books and various debates, I have taken issue with many of the claims of divine revelation or intervention.

My current position . . . is more open to at least certain of these claims. In point of fact, I think that the Christian religion is the one religion that most clearly deserves to be honored and respected. . . . There is nothing like the combination of a charismatic figure like Jesus and a first-class intellectual like St. Paul. . . . If you're wanting Omnipotence to set up a religion, this is the one to beat. (156-57, 185-86)

*The conversion of the person, Saul, as well as the content of the presentation of Christianity by Paul, provide sufficient evidence that Christianity is the one true religion. The historian Luke records the factual clarity of Saul's conversion (Acts 9, 22, 26). Luke also provides historical information from which one can learn about the nature of the case for Christianity presented by Paul. It is this information from which one learns the implications concerning the case for the Christian faith, set forth by Paul, with which we are concerned in the following. Luke summarizes: "And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and . . . reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ'" (Acts 17:2-3, NASV). In this brief statement, one may infer that Paul's case for Christianity was (1) rational, (2) biblical, (3) historical, and (4) Christological.*

Appearing before Agrippa, prior to embarking on his journey to Rome, where he presented his case in appeal to Caesar (cf. Acts 25:6-12, 21; 27:23-24; 28:16-19), Paul, himself, presented a remarkable summation of the case for Christianity. His presentation is called his "defense" (Acts 26:1, 24). The word is *apologeito*. Robertson says, "This is the fullest of all Paul's defenses. . . . [H]e refused to be silent and chose this opportunity, slim as it seemed, to get a fresh hearing for his own case and to present the claims of Christ to this influential man. His address is a *masterpiece of noble apologetic*" (*Word Pictures* 442-43, emp. added).

After reviewing the events that resulted in the cataclysmic change that took place in his life (Acts 26:9-18; cf. 22:3-21; 9:1-20), Paul declared:

Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance. For these reasons the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me.

Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come—"that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles." Now as he thus made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, "Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!" But he said, "I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason. For the king, before whom I also speak freely, knows these things; for I am convinced that none of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe." Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You almost persuade me to become a Christian." And Paul said, "I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains." (Acts 26:19-29)

### **A Biblically Based Case**

The first foundational characteristic implied in the above passage concerning the truth of Christianity is that the case is a biblically based case. Paul said, ". . . I stand . . . saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come" (Acts 26:22). The authority of Christianity ultimately rests in the authority of the written Word—the Holy Scriptures. The knowledge of the authority of the incarnate Word (cf. John 1:1-3, 14) is essentially and absolutely connected to the authority of the biblical documents. The following statement from a 1960's volume edited by Tenney well explains this aspect of the case for Christianity:

. . . [T]he knowledge of Christ is derived only from the written Scriptures. While there is plain evidence that the record concerning Christ is "His story," and has as much natural credence as any other sayings attributed to men who

lived in the ancient world, the question of the reliability of the record is inseparable from the doctrine of inspiration. . . . Apart from the doctrine of inspiration, an interpreter of the sayings of Christ would be without a genuinely authoritative text. Again and again in His teachings there are both direct statements and implications which assert the infallibility and divine origin of the Scriptures of the Old Testament and predict as well the inspiration of the New Testament. . . . The integrity of the Scriptures and the integrity of the person of Christ are inseparable. It is for this reason that denial of the inspiration of the Scripture when carried to its logical conclusion has led historically to the denial of the person of Jesus Christ and the reduction of His deity in some measure below the infinite standard attributed to Him in the Scriptures. (Walvoord 186-88)

Paul's case for Christianity rested in the Scriptures and their complete inspiration (cf. Acts 17:1-3; Rom. 1:1-4; 16:25-27; 1 Cor. 2:13; 4:6; 14:37; Eph. 3:1-5; 1 Tim. 5:17-18; 2 Tim. 3:14-17, et al). The case stands or falls on this issue of the nature of the Bible. Is it the inspired and infallible Word of God or not? Paul did not set forth a detailed argument for the Bible being a production of God as he affirmed to Agrippa that he was "saying nothing but what the [Old Testament] prophets and Moses" had said would occur. However, he later implied the case for Christianity entails just such a sound argument (cf. Acts 26:25).

Inspiration guarantees the veracity of the content of revelation. "It must be clearly understood that the battle being waged against the inspiration of the Bible is . . . an assault upon historic Christianity and its foundation, Jesus Christ. . . . Scripture is recognized to be the supreme bulwark of the historic Christian Faith" (Finlayson 234). The case for the truthfulness of Christianity must ultimately be made from the Bible itself. The closing words of Paul in his epistle to the Romans implies that he claimed the case for Christianity presented by him is biblically based: "Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the

revelation . . . made manifest . . . by the prophetic Scriptures" (Rom. 16:25-26).

### **A Christologically Centered Case**

In the second place, Paul's presentation of the case for Christianity included at its center "that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles" (Acts 26:23). *The Expositor's Greek Testament* connects verses 22 and 23 with the explanation that Paul's message was that which is "most certain from the authority of Scripture, 'how that Christ' . . . 'must suffer' . . . 'that he first by the resurrection of the dead,' . . . [would give] assurance . . . that in Him . . . all the O.T. prophecies of the blessings of light and life, to Jew and Gentile alike, were to be fulfilled" (Knowling 509-10). Here are the facts of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ "like three piers supporting a wonderful bridge, that spans the arch from the shores of time to the shores of eternity" (Hardeman 40).

The notable thing about the Christian exegesis of the Scriptures is that they began with the person of Jesus himself, who, they were convinced, was God's final Word to man, and sought in the Scriptures (the acknowledged oracles of God) ways of understanding his significance and relating it to the whole of redemptive history. . . . *They preached a person.* Their message was frankly Christocentric. Indeed, often enough the gospel is referred to simply as Jesus or Christ: "He preached Jesus to him." To the Jews Jesus was the fulfillment of God's work in history: to the Gentiles Jesus marked the end of God's apparent disinterest. Jesus the man, Jesus crucified, Jesus risen, Jesus exalted to the place of power in the universe from which he would return in judgment at the end of the age, Jesus who meantime was present among his people in the Spirit . . . This, it seems, was the main burden of what they taught about Jesus. There was little about his life, if we may judge from the Pauline epistles and the speeches in



Acts; little about his teaching and his miracles. The stress all fell on his cross and resurrection and his present power and significance. The risen Christ was unambiguously central in their message. (Green 86, 150)

This single evidence of the presentation of Jesus Christ—His person and His work—within the pages of the Bible is sufficient to warrant the deduction the Bible is a production of God, and the deduction that Jesus Christ is beyond human invention and, therefore, is divine or deity (God).

It was utterly impossible that the Christ of these pages could have been . . . the literary invention of His contemporaries. . . . The resurrection of Christ . . . clinches the . . . argument . . . [the resurrection] was the central point . . . the edge of their appeal. Without the all-embracing truth Christianity cannot stand. (Blaiklock and Blaiklock 58, 70)

Paul's presentation of Christianity included that "He [Jesus] would be the first to rise from the dead" (Acts 26:23). He "having been raised from the dead, dies no more" (Rom. 6:9). This claim was (is) unique. N. T. Wright wrote,

. . . [I]nstead of resurrection being something that was simply going to happen to all God's people at the end, the early Christians said it had happened to one person in advance. Now, no first-century Jew, as far as we know, believed there would be one person raised ahead of everybody else. So that's a radical innovation, but they all believed that. (199)

### **An Intellectually Sound Case**

Luke continues his account of these events by saying, "Now as he [Paul] thus made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, 'Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!' But he [Paul] said, 'I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the

words of truth and reason'" (Acts 26:24-25). Paul was a good thinker having been taught by a great teacher, Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). Professor Flew called Paul "a first-class intellectual" (157, 185-86). Paul "gained a thoroughly trained mind. He was all in all the most gifted man of his time, leaving out of view, of course, Jesus of Nazareth. . . . [H]is brilliant intellect had received really magnificent training. . ." (Robertson, *Epochs* 19).

It appears that Festus believed Paul had received a rather extensive education (cf. Acts 26:24). The word translated *learning* refers to "the body of information acquired in school or from the study of writing, learning, education, elementary knowledge and higher education" (Rogers and Rogers 304-05). Furthermore, Paul was honest. Swinburne says, "It is difficult to read those [Paul's] letters without getting the impression that he was a very honest and conscientious person" (92).

"Paul was very concerned with being rational. He defended his commitment to Jesus Christ and the Christian faith with the affirmation that his position was rational. . . . What he meant was that the Christian faith is 'intellectually sound'" (Pugh 62). The word translated *reason* (v. 25, NKJV) "denotes . . . 'the rational' in the sense of what is intellectually sound . . ." (Luck 1097). The case for Christianity does not fetter thought. It invites investigation. It honors the law of rationality (cf. 1 Thess. 5:21).

The following is taken from my book, *Life's Greatest Acclamation* (2006). Documentation provided is from the original sources consulted:

Professor George John Romanes (1848-1894) was a passionate biological scientist. He was a student and friend of Charles Darwin and a professor at Oxford. Through the influence of Darwinism he lost his faith in God and, as Gore observed, "his mind moved rapidly and sharply into a position of reasoned skepticism about the existence of God at all" (*Thoughts* 9). In 1876, he published anonymously a work entitled *A Candid Examination of Theism* in which he denied the existence of God. The authorship of this work did not become known until after Romanes' death in 1894.

Nearly two years following Romanes' death (May 23, 1894), J. W. McGarvey wrote an essay, "The Darkness of Atheism" (April 11, 1896) in which he cited a passage from Romanes that he (McGarvey) said "reads like the wail of a lost soul" (140).

I am not ashamed to confess that with this virtual negation of God the universe to me has lost its soul of loveliness. . . . [W]hen at times I think, as think at times I must, of the appalling contrast between the hallowed glory of that creed which once was mine, and the lonely mystery of existence as now I find it,--at such times I shall ever feel it impossible to avoid the sharpest pang of which my nature is susceptible. (*Thoughts* 28)

Sometime before 1889, Romanes wrote three essays that were unpublished at the time of writing. One of these was *A Candid Examination of Religion*, which was a critique of his former work, *A Candid Examination of Theism*. In the later work (*Religion*), he says, "It will be shown that in many respects the negative conclusions reached in the former essay have been greatly modified by the results of maturer thought as now presented in the second" (99). Romanes had reclaimed his faith in God, and wrote:

I know from experience the intellectual distractions of scientific research, philosophical speculation, and artistic pleasures; but am also aware that even when all are taken together and well sweetened to taste . . . the whole concoction is but as high confectionery to a starving man . . . take it then as unquestionably true that this whole negative side of the subject proves a vacuum in the soul of man which nothing can fill save faith in God. (*Thoughts* 150-52)

In *The Life and Letters of George John Romanes*, written and edited by his wife E. Romanes, there is the following significant statement that speaks volumes concerning the intellectual failure of unbelief: "When the Shadow of Death lay on him, and the dread messenger was drawing near, and he looked back on his short life, he could reproach himself only for what he called sins of the intellect, mental arrogance, undue regard for intellectual supremacy" (352).

Romanes died on Wednesday, May 23, 1894, at the young age of 46. On the preceding Thursday he had said, "*I have now come to see that faith is intellectually justifiable. It is Christianity or nothing*" (349).

There is a real sense in which these words sum up the intellectual soundness of Paul's case for Christianity.

### **An Historically Evaluated Case**

Continuing the response to Festus and his defense of Christianity, Paul says, "For the king [Agrippa], before whom I also speak freely, knows these things. . . . [N]one of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner" (Acts 26:26). Since the case for Christianity is based on historical events, and not solely on religious ideas, the case can be investigated and evaluated as history.

E. M. Blaiklock, the classical historian, who held the Chair of Classics at the University of Auckland for twenty-one years, called the resurrection of Christ "perhaps the best authenticated fact in ancient history" (70). F. F. Bruce wrote that in the "summary of the evidence for the reality of Christ's resurrection, Paul shows a sound instinct for the necessity of marshalling personal testimony in support of what might well appear an incredible assertion" (19). Commenting on this very situation of Paul's defense before Agrippa, Wilbur Smith wrote:

Paul asked Agrippa, "Why should it be thought incredible that God should raise the dead?" and then in that powerful apologetic he dwells more on the fact of and evidence for

the Resurrection than on any other aspect of the Christian faith, even declaring it was prophesied in the Old Testament (Acts 26:6-8, 22-23). The preaching of this truth established the Christian faith. This is what shook the world; this is what won great multitudes of Jews to Christianity; this is what brought about the conversion of St. Paul. On the Damascus road he saw the ascended Lord and he knew God had raised Him from the dead, and therefore he declared Him to be God's only begotten Son. Obviously, then, one cannot explain away the Resurrection by saying the Jews didn't believe it. Many of them did. Indeed, it is the very thing to which those who became Christians tenaciously clung, the miracle which they spoke of incessantly. Where did they get this conviction? From historical fact. (29-30)

### An Evangelistically Purposed Case

Finally, Paul made a personal appeal to King Agrippa that evidences the ultimate purpose of his defense. Paul said, "King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe" (Acts 26:27). What was Paul seeking to do? Robertson says Paul "was the man of action whirling over the Roman Empire . . . with no less a purpose than to bring the Roman Empire to the feet of Christ" (*Epochs* 1). Agrippa responded to Paul in such fashion that implies he knew what the purpose of Paul was. "Then Agrippa said to Paul, 'You almost persuade me to become a Christian'" (Acts 26:28, NKJV). Whether one follows the preceding translation, or accepts other recent renderings of verse 28 such as the English Standard Version (2001), the purpose of Paul remains obvious. The ESV renders Agrippa's response as "In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?" Paul defended the case for Christianity as reported in Acts 26:19-29, because he knew it to be true. However, his ultimate purpose was to present the case in such fashion that all who heard him would also come to acknowledge the truth of Christianity and be obedient to the same. That such was Paul's motive is clearly seen to be the case from verse 29. Here he implies that his desire is that each one who heard him

would become a Christian. In response to Agrippa Paul said, ". . . I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am—except for these chains" (Acts 26:29).

There is a crucial relationship between *apologetics* (the defense of Christianity) and *evangelism* (soul winning). As Paul made his defense (*apologeito*) his goal was to "destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God . . ." (2 Cor. 10:4-5, ESV) so that individuals (Agrippa included) would bring their thinking captive to the obedience of Christ. Since "those who do not know God and . . . do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus . . . will pay the penalty of eternal destination, away from the presence of the Lord" (2 Thess. 1:8-9, NASV), it surely is the case that a true presentation of the case for Christianity, like that set forth by Paul, ultimately seeks to see people delivered (saved) from the awesome fate of eternal lostness. One may observe this in the various speeches or sermons delivered by the apostles and other early evangelists and recorded in Acts. There is a sense in which each of these speeches, or sermons, is apologetical in its basic approach. The ultimate aim was evangelistic—convert the hearers—but the means to this end was apologetical—the rational presentation of evidence that led to the conclusion that Jesus is both Lord and Christ (cf. Acts 2:22-36; 17:1-3; 26:22-29, et al).

"Primitive evangelism was by no means mere proclamation and exhortation; it included able intellectual argument, skillful study of the scriptures, careful, closely reasoned teaching and patient argument. . . . If it had had an inadequate intellectual basis it would not have last long" (Green 160). And, seeing all of this so wonderfully balanced in the case for Christianity set forth by Paul, it is then measured out with a spirit of genuine love and concern for all who heard it. Can we not feel the passion in Paul's heart as we read the words he spoke with his voice?—"I would to God that . . . *all* who hear me . . . *might become* such as I am—*except for these chains*" (emp. added). And how did he ultimately become what he was? He answers, "But by the grace of God I am what I am . . ." (1 Cor. 15:10). A proper defense of the Christian faith does not entail any element of a mean or unkind spirit. Rather, it

has been said that the apologist needs a lump in the throat and a tear in the eye (cf. Jer. 9:1; Luke 19:41).

For more than thirty-five years, with the limited abilities I possess, I have tried hard to study the case for Christianity. During this time, I have not heard, or read after anyone who lived during the twentieth century, or thus far in the twenty-first century, whom I thought was more skillful as a Christian apologist than the late Thomas B. Warren (1920-2000). Warren was an extremely gifted thinker, and yet his intellectual abilities did not, in my judgment, exceed the loving concern and kindness he manifested in presentation of the case for Christianity. As an example of this, I cite from his 1978 debate on the existence of God with atheistic professor, Dr. Wallace I. Matson, from the University of California at Berkeley. In the conclusion to this debate, I heard Dr. Warren make one of the kindest, most loving appeals on behalf of Christianity, which I have heard (or read). Before thousands in attendance, he addressed Dr. Matson and said:

. . . I assure you, Dr. Matson, that . . . I try to preach that *every* man ought to love *every* other man on this earth; that if there is any answer to the racism we find in the world, it is in the religion of Jesus Christ; that the gospel has the great purpose of drawing all men into *one body*, that we may *all* be *one* in Christ, no matter whether you are from Africa, Europe, China, South America, or wherever. Paul makes this clear in Ephesians 2:13-16. And to intimate that we Christians do not love those who live in adultery or in homosexuality or that we do not love those who are even guilty of murder is to simply and flagrantly misrepresent us. The fact that we point out that these things are *sin* and that those who live in *willful disobedience* and who die in that condition will be *lost*, does *not* mean that we do not love them!

It was the same Lord who said to the woman taken in adultery, “Go thy way and *sin no more*,” who said in Matthew 7: 14, 15, “Enter ye in at the narrow gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth unto

destruction and many are there that enter in thereby. But narrow is the gate and strait the way that leadeth unto life and few there be that find it.”

. . . And the Lord Jesus Christ who loved every person, even Wallace Matson, who was aware of his unhappy childhood, is aware of his problems even today, who loves him in spite of all that he has said against Him and who would forgive him—even as he would have forgiven *Judas*, if Judas had come to Jesus in penitence and, in effect, fallen down and said, “O Lord forgive me, I know I have been wrong.” Our Lord would have been as willing to put His arm around Judas, in loving kindness and forgiveness, as He did around Peter. Peter *denied* Him; Judas *betrayed* Him. But Peter *repented!* And whose sermon do we have recorded in the second chapter of Acts but that of *Peter?* Dr. Matson, *that’s* Christianity!

We are brought together in one body, to love each other, because we love Christ. . . . There is no way that two people can come nearer to *Christ* without coming nearer to *each other!* How deeply sorry I feel for every person who has rejected God, for every person who has rejected the gift of God, for every person who in spite of the fact that Jesus said “Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart and ye shall find rest unto your souls.”

I have had a great deal of tragedy happen in my life, but I’m not here to tell you about *me*, but about *Him who died for you*, that you might live forever. (343-45)

Here is the case for Christianity presented after the pattern of that seen in Paul: Biblically based, Christologically centered, intellectually sound, historically evaluated, and evangelistically purposed. Its base is firm. Its center is beyond human invention. Its soundness is unanswerable. Its facts are incontrovertible. Its purpose involves the incomparable. Here is truth and rationality in beautiful balance. “But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have

believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him . . .” (2 Tim. 1:12). Blessed assurance! The case for Christianity will never fly from its firm base. The solid foundation of God forever stands (2 Tim. 2:19). Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8).

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### Biographical Sketch

Charles C. Pugh III was born in Marietta, OH. His early education was in Parkersburg-Vienna, WV, schools and he graduated from Parkersburg High School in 1966, which at that time was one of the largest high schools East of the Mississippi.

His higher education included Ohio Valley University, Harding University, and Harding Graduate School of Religion where he did his graduate work in Apologetics, studying under the late Dr. Thomas B. Warren. Charles has studied, taught, and written in the field of Christian Apologetics for more than 35 years.

For several years, he did local ministry serving as preacher for a number of churches of Christ in Ohio and West Virginia. Since 1994, Pugh has chaired the field of Apologetics studies at West Virginia School of Preaching, Moundsville, WV. He regularly teaches courses on the existence of God, the divine origin of the Bible, and the deity of Jesus Christ. He is Director of Warren Christian Apologetics Center, a non-profit informational theistic center ([www.warrenapologeticscenter.org](http://www.warrenapologeticscenter.org)).

In 1999, Charles was diagnosed with a vocal fold disease, Spasmodic Dysphonia. However, he continues to maintain a full schedule of speaking appointments. He is also a published author who writes extensively on the crosscurrents of present-day thinking as related to the foundational issues of Apologetics. His works include *-Things Most Surely Believed – Evidence Essays* (2002), *Life's Greatest Acclamation-God* (2006), and *That Your Joy May Be Full – More Evidence Essays* (2007). Brief tractates authored by Mr. Pugh include *Christianity vs. Islam* (2003, 3<sup>rd</sup> printing 2007), *What the Bible Is all About* (2008, 2<sup>nd</sup> printing 2010), and *Walking through Life's Valleys* (2009).

He and his wife Sharon, live in Vienna, WV. They are the parents of three children: a daughter, Mendy Brewster, who teaches English Literature and lives with her husband Ben, who serves as a minister, in Bosier City, LA; a son, Chip Pugh, who is Head Strength and Conditioning Coach at Tennessee Tech University, and lives with his wife Nicole in Cookeville, TN; and a daughter, Nicole, who also lives at Cookeville, where she works in Health and Wellness with the Middle Tennessee YMCA. Charles and Sharon have three granddaughters and a grandson.

# *Aquila, Priscilla, and Apollos*

Acts 18:1-3, 24-28

*Greg Circle*

When studying the book of Acts, we find many wonderful lessons: how men and women became Christians (our examples for how men and women can do the same today), how men and women are to be corrected when they are in error, and many



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others. We have been given the task of looking at Acts 18:24-28; in which we find Apollos coming into Ephesus to teach, and Aquila and Priscilla correcting him. Ian Marshall believes that this passage is a way for Luke to introduce Paul's return to Ephesus (302). When Paul returns to Ephesus, he finds what could have been the result of Apollos' teaching. With these few verses, Luke tells us why these disciples only knew of John's baptism. In addition, this passage offers as many lessons to be learned and questions to be answered as almost any other passage in the book of Acts.

## **Background for Aquila and Priscilla**

When we first meet this godly couple, we find them in Corinth. Paul meets them here when he is on the return trip of his second missionary journey. Aquila was born in Pontus, but had lived in Rome with his wife for some time (Acts 18:2). In AD 49, they were forced to leave Rome when Emperor Claudius banished the Jews because they "constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus" (Tranquillus 25.4). "It is possible that Crestus

(meaning 'the useful one') is a misunderstanding of Christus, a term that was meaningless to Romans" (Harrison and Pfeiffer 1158). Some believe this, combined with the fact that Luke mentions him as a Jew in Acts 18:2, to be evidence that Aquila was not yet a Christian when he met Paul. This is, of course, inconclusive because, as Matthew Henry points out, "Aquila, though a Christian, was banished because he had been a Jew; and the Gentiles had such confused notions of the thing that they could not distinguish between Jew and Christian" (233-4). Others say that, because Luke never mentions his conversion, Aquila was already a Christian before he met Paul. Whether Aquila and Priscilla obeyed the Gospel before or after they met Paul, they were Christians and gave Paul much needed help in the difficult times he endured (Rom. 16:4). Because of their work with Paul, they had enough knowledge about Christ that they were able to show Apollos "the way of God more perfectly."

## **Background for Apollos**

Apollos was a Jew born in Alexandria (Acts 18:24), a great center of knowledge and learning. "It had the largest library in the world – almost 700,000 volumes. . . . The Greek version of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, had been produced at Alexandria. Philo, one of the most famous Jewish teachers who ever lived, made Alexandria his home" (Roper 160).

We later find Apollos going to Corinth where he indeed made an impact on those who "had believed through grace" (Acts 18:27). [Note: All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.] In 1 Corinthians, we find that the Christians there were divided. While one was saying, "I am of Paul," another was saying, "I am of Apollos" (1 Cor. 3:4) even though, "neither of these countenanced this partisanship in his favor. . . . Paul always speaks of Apollos with the highest esteem and affection" (Lipscomb and Shepherd 47).

Apollos was a great teacher before he met Aquila and Priscilla and, not knowing that the apostles had received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, convinced many to look forward to the coming kingdom. He was an even better teacher after this godly couple

took him aside and “expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.” Through their instruction, Apollos learned that Jesus had fulfilled all that had been prophesied concerning Him.

### **Apollos: His Attributes** (v. 24)

Apollos had several attributes that made him an excellent teacher. Luke first mentions two of these attributes in Acts 18:24. “[A] certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an **eloquent** man, *and mighty in the scriptures*, came to Ephesus” (emp. added). As was mentioned before, Apollos was born in one of the greatest centers of learning this world has known. This great city, “having been for at least two centuries the chief point of contact between Greek and Hebrew literature, had now become the chief seat of Hebrew learning” (McGarvey, *New* 147). Most do not doubt that Apollos was a student at Alexandria’s famous university and was taught by Philo. For this reason, Luke could say that Apollos was *eloquent*.

The word for eloquent is (*logios*). “This word has two meanings, a. ‘eloquent’ and b. ‘educated’ or ‘learned.’ Sense b. is more common in Philo and Josephus.... In the light of v. 25 and 1 Cor. 1:12 ‘eloquent’ is often preferred here, but the accompanying clause would also justify ‘learned’” (Kittel 514). Some, such as Lenski, disagree with this definition. “The A.V. version correctly translates *logios*, ‘eloquent’ as distinguished from the R.V.’s ‘learned.’ Apollos was gifted and well-trained dialectically” (769). Lenski’s point is that Apollos was more than just learned. He was able to take his opponents arguments, find the contradictions therein, and easily communicate those flaws.

Luke also described Apollos as **mighty in the Scriptures**. This does not mean that Apollos was inspired. The apostles had the Holy Spirit with them guiding their words (John 14:26), Apollos did not. He did, however, have a great amount of knowledge concerning the Old Testament. Like us, Apollos “was entirely dependent upon the use of the prophecies and types of the Old Testament, in proof of the Messiahship [of Christ]” (McGarvey, *Commentary* 231).

Combine these two abilities, and you have described a man who “was learned in the Scriptures, able to dispute with those who questioned him and able to demonstrate that the recent events were in agreement with the Old Testament” (Martin 230).

### **Apollos: His Instruction** (25)

Next, Luke tells us about the things that Apollos knew—the things that he taught. He “was instructed in the way of the Lord” (Acts 18:25). In many cases “the way” refers to Christianity, but with the added prepositional phrase “of the Lord” this could be a reference to what John the Immerser had taught: “Make straight **the way of the Lord**” (John 1:23, emp. added). Apollos was instructed in those things that would lead to the coming Savior. He only knew the Old Testament and that “the kingdom of Heaven [was] at hand.”

With his instruction in “the way of the Lord,” we find that Apollos also had a great zeal for teaching what he had learned. He had a disposition that allowed him to teach well. “Knowledge without zeal condemns the teacher” (Jackson 230). Apollos was not merely relaying bland information. With his great fervency, he was able to speak and teach “accurately the things of the Lord” (NKJV), or at least the part he knew.

However, it is in this verse that we find a problem with this wonderful teacher. He taught “knowing **only** the baptism of John” (emp. added). His knowledge was incomplete. He had not been taught about the baptism that Jesus commanded in the Great Commission. It was into this baptism that those disciples in the next chapter were baptized (Acts 19:5).

Some people today have a great problem that this verse could correct if they let it. They put their trust in polished orators who broadcast religious programming. Unfortunately, these orators have an incomplete knowledge, or they purposefully leave out some parts, of God’s perfect doctrine. This passage teaches that no matter how eloquently a man speaks, and no matter how learned he is, if he is not speaking the whole counsel of God, then he is leading the people who listen to and follow him astray.



### **Apollos: His Correction** (v. 26)

Now that he has shown where Apollos was in error, Luke discusses how he was taught out of his error. Apollos began “to speak **boldly** in the synagogue.” This is where the correction of any mistake begins. A band director often instructs his students to, “Play out; so that if you make a mistake, we’ll know where it is, and we can correct it.” When Aquila and Priscilla heard what Apollos was preaching, their ears rang with dissonance because it was different from the teaching about Christ that they knew was in tune with the truth.

Aquila and Priscilla took Apollos to the side and “expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.” “Knowing [and teaching] only the baptism of John” was not enough. There was something that was missing from what he taught. John’s baptism was a “baptism of repentance” (Mark 1:4) “in much water” (John 3:23) “for the remission of sins” (Mark 1:4). Those who heard Christ were “baptized with the baptism of John” (Luke 7:29). However, in this later time, Aquila and Priscilla had more information. Paul had taught them about the baptism that was commanded by Christ. After Jesus’ resurrection, He gave a new command concerning baptism. For the apostles to make a disciple, they needed to baptize them “into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19, ASV).

Apollos was inaccurately teaching about Christ. Being a disciple of John, he knew about the coming Messiah. He may have even learned that the Messiah was Jesus of Nazareth. In any case, Aquila and Priscilla taught Apollos the things he needed to know; probably starting with the predictions that John made about Christ – “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 3:11, NKJV), and their fulfillment – the apostles “were all filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:4, NKJV).

There appears to be some question as to whether or not Apollos was baptized with the baptism that Jesus commanded. Most writers on this subject who are members of the church say, “No.” Wayne Jackson, for instance, wrote, “[W]as Apollos baptized at *this* time? . . . [T]here is not the slightest indication [that he was]” (231). Burton Coffman, on the other hand, cites Everett F. Harrison who

said, “Quite likely, Apollos was now baptized by Aquila in the name of Christ” (Coffman 359, Harrison 1159).

In either case, we can agree with David Roper when he says, “this entire discussion is a matter of speculation, and the opinion of one should not be bound on another” (164-65). If it was necessary for Apollos to be baptized after Aquila and Priscilla taught him, he was. If it was not, he was not.

We then have what completes the band illustration: Apollos accepts the instruction and makes the proper corrections. He was not like some teachers who would have said, “Who are you to correct me? I studied in Alexandria, the home of Philo. I know what I’m talking about.”

Apollos was not a man who merely echoed the learning of his day, who merely swallowed all that he was taught and let it puff him up with intellectual pride, who disdained everything that did not bear the stamp of the schools.... That is exactly where thousands of highly titled university graduates are pitifully weak. They are perhaps mighty against the Scriptures with their learning but not mighty in the Scriptures, filled with the spiritual power that has its source in the saving truth of Holy Writ. (Lenski 770)

In Apollos’ correction, we find the importance of listening: both the importance of Apollos listening to his instructors, and the importance of Christians listening for false or incorrect teaching. Aquila and Priscilla were alert and involved listeners, ready to respond to error. They had also studied enough that they knew the difference between truth and error and did not need to wait for Paul to show up to ask for his help. They could answer Apollos on the spot. Additionally, they knew the proper way to address someone in error, by first taking him to the side and exposing the error privately. They followed the principle given by Christ in Matthew 18:15. “Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.”

One other point about the correction of Apollos should be made:

Priscilla was also involved in the instruction. As God was showing Adam all that He had created, “there was not found a helper comparable to him.” So, God created Eve from one of Adam’s ribs (Gen. 2:20, 21). Woman was created to be a helper to her husband, a fellow worker. When we look at the account of Aquila, Priscilla, and Apollos, we should note the importance of a good Christian wife not just to preachers of the Gospel, but to all Christian men. Aquila could have taught Apollos on his own or with the help of another Christian man, but he chose to work with Priscilla. A husband and wife are already a team in life. Why not be a team in the work of converting others to Christ? That being said, “this illustrates the manner in which certain faithful women were eminent helpers of the apostles and evangelists in the spread of the gospel; yet it can not, without a deceitful handling of the Scriptures, be urged as proof that even the most eminent of the female helpers took part in public preaching” (McGarvey, *New* 148).

#### **Apollos: His Inclusion** (v. 27)

After Aquila and Priscilla taught Apollos “the way of God more perfectly,” Apollos decided to move on to Achaia—southern Greece. Luke does not communicate the reason for the move, but he does write about the support that the brethren gave Apollos as he departed. Apollos would have been able to do much good in Corinth, but he was unknown to the church there. They would not have accepted him as they would Paul (2 Cor. 3:1). The Ephesian brethren therefore sent a letter with Apollos “exhorting the brethren to receive him.” This is similar to the commendation Paul received just after his conversion (Acts 9:27) because the news of his conversion and subsequent bold preaching in Damascus had not yet made it to the ears of the apostles in Jerusalem. By sending a letter to Corinth with Apollos, the Ephesian brethren showed his inclusion in their work.

When Apollos came to Corinth, he was included in the work there as well. He promptly went to work and “helped them much which had believed through grace.” Apollos’ eloquence would have appealed to many in that city. “This may be one reason why

some preferred Apollos over Paul (1 Cor. 2:1)” (Roper 166). Again, it should be emphasized that Apollos did not necessarily condone this response.

#### **Apollos: His Accomplishments** (v. 28)

One of Apollos’ accomplishments in Corinth was helping those who believed. His greater accomplishment was that “he mightily **convinced** the Jews.” “He met the opposing arguments one by one and sent them crashing down to the ground” (Jackson 231). In this, Paul had not been completely unsuccessful. “Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house” (Acts 18:8). However, Paul did get “fed up” with their failure to accept sound reason. “He knew that he could do them no good by further reasoning and persuading them” (Boles 288). It was not because of a lack of effort or ability, but because of his perceived lack of eloquence. “And I, brethren, when I came to you, **came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom**, declaring unto you the testimony of God” (1 Cor. 2:1, emp. added). When Apollos came to Corinth, he was able to build on what Paul had started there. Paul said, “I have planted, Apollos watered” (1 Cor. 3:6).

Apollos was able to mightily convince the Jews using the same tools that Paul had. “He showed **by the Scriptures** that Jesus was the Christ.” When Paul went into a synagogue, he “reasoned with them **out of the scriptures**, opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that ‘this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ’ (Acts 17:2, 3, emp. added). The only difference was their talents. “As Paul had made a comparative failure with the Jews of Corinth, the success of Apollos illustrates the value of a variety of talents and acquirements among preachers, in order to the successful evangelization of the great variety of minds and characters often found in a single community” (McGarvey, *New* 149).

#### **Conclusion**

The greatest lesson this passage teaches is the necessity of Bible study and that we should always be on guard against error. We must remember that even a knowledgeable and eloquent speaker

may still teach false doctrine. Therefore, we should “study to show ourselves approved” (2 Tim. 2:15). Like Aquila and Priscilla, we must be ready to teach others God’s truth and correct error promptly, yet in a loving manner. Although there are a variety of talents among Christians, we can trust that if we do our part in preaching the Gospel, it is “God that giveth the increase.”

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#### Biographical Sketch

Greg is a native of West Virginia. He was baptized into Christ on May 6, 1990, by David Epler in Princeton, WV. His father and maternal grandfather were song leaders, and Greg followed suit. He used his talents as a musician to pursue his B.A. in Music Education from Marshall University in Huntington, WV. Greg married his high school sweetheart, Elizabeth, in 2002. After teaching a year in Wyoming County, WV, Greg decided to put his newly found and gradually improving teaching skills to good use and applied to West Virginia School of Preaching. Greg graduated in 2008 and soon after was hired to work for Newcomerstown Church of Christ, where he continues to work.

# The Jerusalem Conference

Acts 15:1-35

*Charles J. Aebi*

My thanks cannot be over-expressed to the Hillview church and West Virginia School of Preaching for the work here and for allowing me a part in that work. One of my reasons for moving south from Pittsburgh years ago was to help train preachers for the



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church in the greater Ohio Valley, which I did for 34 years at Ohio Valley College and now for twelve years here at WVSOP. I also appreciate the opportunity to speak on the topic assigned me in this 2010 lectureship—the Jerusalem Conference of Acts 15. We need to study and re-study the book of Acts so we can use its approved examples as patterns for our own work.

In evangelism one thing we need to have clarified near the beginning of a Bible study is the source of our authority in spiritual matters. In particular, it must be understood that the New Testament, not the Old, is the acceptable guide for Christians. Often today the Old Testament and the New Testament are quoted indiscriminately to substantiate some practice being advocated, and many do not know the difference between the Testaments. Even some who claim to be Gospel preachers and elders run to the Old Testament to attempt to justify their wish to add instrumental music to the worship. We have come to expect that from Roman Catholics and Protestants, but we think our own brethren should know better. However, to find brethren arguing for some adherence to the Law of Moses is not a new phenomenon; it dates

back at least to the Jerusalem conference described in Acts 15 and (this writer believes) Galatians 2.

## Background of the Jerusalem Conference

A separate religion that did not embody the Old Testament system and that was not a sect of Judaism did not sit well with many first-century Jews. Though the Jewish sects did not get along well with each other, two of them (Pharisees and Sadducees) united in opposing Jesus and His followers. The Jewish leaders demanded the crucifixion of Jesus because of envy (Mark 15:10) and because He did not conform to their Messianic expectations. When it was reported to them that Jesus had arisen from the dead, they invented the story that the disciples had stolen the body while the soldiers slept (Matt. 28:13). Some fifty days later when the apostles first proclaimed the Gospel of the resurrected and reigning Christ, 3,000 Jews repented of their part in crucifying Jesus and were baptized and added to the newly born church (Acts 2). In Acts 4 the Sadducees had Peter and John arrested; by this time the church numbered 5,000 men (Acts 4:4) and continued to grow more after the two were released. In Acts 5, the Sadducees had the apostles arrested and brought before the council of Sadducees and Pharisees, with the result that the apostles were beaten and ordered again not to preach Jesus. In Acts 6:7, we learn that even many priests were converted. Saul of Tarsus led a persecution against Christians, but in Acts 9 we learn that even he was converted. For the Jews, things truly were getting out of hand!

Thus far, those converted had all been Jews religiously, some proselytes but most having been born to Jewish parents. With Cornelius in Acts 10-11, the conversion of Gentiles began. Acts 11:18 suggests that the Jewish Christians at Jerusalem accepted Peter's explanation that the Holy Spirit had endorsed the Gentiles becoming Christians. Their objections to it were silenced then, but they did not all remain silent when they heard that Saul and Barnabas had been sent out by the Antioch (Syria) on a successful preaching expedition among Gentiles. Some of them went to Antioch to protest this, and that led to "the Jerusalem conference."

This writer's understanding of the Jerusalem conference is based on Galatians 2:1-10 describing the same events as Acts 15:1-31. A large majority of the commentaries consulted for this paper identify the Galatians 2 and Acts 15 accounts as referring to the same occasion. In 1860, Joseph Allison Alexander said it was commonly agreed that Galatians 2 referred to the Acts 15 conference (73). Some 118 years ago, J. W. McGarvey wrote, ". . . recent writers are almost unanimous in deciding that it is the same [event]" (57). Farrar puts the decisive evidence in a nutshell as follows: "

In the two narratives the same people go up at the same time, from the same place, for the same object, in consequence of the same interference by the same agitators, and with the same results. Against the absolute certainty of the conclusion that the visits described were one and the same, there is nothing whatever to set but trivial differences of detail, every one of which is accounted for in the text. (406)

Reese agrees, saying that Irenaeus and Tertullian identified Acts 15 and Galatians 2 (527). Hendriksen says Berkhof, Eerdman, Findlay, Greijdanus, Grosheide, Lightfoot, Rendall, Kampen, Ramsay, and Parker all agree with him that Galatians 2 is synonymous with Acts 15. He gives six reasons for thinking the trips identical, and he answers the opposing arguments that identify Galatians 2 with Acts 11:27-30 and 12:25 (70-73). Hendriksen agrees with Lenski that it is chronologically impossible for the Acts 11 and Galatians 2 trips to be the same (73). Burton Coffman agrees, both in his commentary on Galatians (28) and in his commentary on Acts in which he gives six reasons for thinking the same trip is described in Acts 15 and Galatians 2 (289-292). To this list of commentators who identify the two accounts we may add Albert Barnes (303), Lipscomb and Shepherd (201-202), H. Leo Boles (233), Robert Johnson (54), John Stacy (44), John Waddey (162), and others.

F. F. Bruce disagrees, saying that "Galatians was written shortly before the Council of Jerusalem" (298). Hendriksen says that Bruce, along with Calvin, Duncan, Ellis, Emmet, Hoerber, and Knox, believe that Galatians 2:1-10 coincides with the Acts 11-12 visit of Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem (73). Roper concludes that it does not matter: "Since the two accounts tell of similar incidents, if not the same incident, we will include a few details from Galatians 2 in the comments on Acts 15" (2).

### **Significance of the Jerusalem Conference**

What was the significance of that conference? What brought it about? What were the real issues as well as the immediate demands? What procedures were used to deal with those issues? To what conclusions did it come? How were those conclusions implemented? What was its result? Did it set any precedent that could or should be used again? What lesson is in it for us? These are all valid questions to consider.

The Jerusalem church's meeting in Acts 15 is not (in Scripture) called a conference, a council, nor any other of the terms that have come to be used to describe meetings that have legislated for religious groups. For the purposes of this lecture, the term "Jerusalem conference" will be used to describe that meeting. Unlike many of the church councils, synod meetings, presbyteries, regional conferences, and general assemblies of later centuries, the Jerusalem conference was presided over and its conclusions given by apostles and inspired men. Therefore, its procedures should serve as models approved both by inspiration and by common sense. Its conclusions should have settled the issue of the Law versus the Gospel for all time, but the subsequent writings of the apostle Paul clearly show that it did not, for in most of his letters he had to deal with Judaizers (those who would bind Moses' Law on Christians, especially Gentile Christians). While God clearly declared by inspiration that Christianity is ruled by the Gospel, not the Law, men continued to confuse the two and mix them together, a practice that continues in many ways to this very day not only by Jews, but by Gentiles who for various reasons feel the need to make some Old Testament practices their own.

### **The Procedure: What Actually Happened**

Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch (Syria) from what many call “the first missionary journey” and reported their success in converting some Jews and many Gentiles to Christ and starting churches in southern Galatia in the cities of Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, as well as in Cyprus (Acts 13-14). Some men came from Judea to Antioch in Acts 15, claiming falsely (Acts 15:24) to have been sent from the Jerusalem church; they taught that Gentiles had to be circumcised according to Mosaic Law to be saved. Paul and Barnabas debated this, and the Antioch church sent Paul, Barnabas, and some other brethren to Jerusalem to be sure about this. God endorsed the trip, and Titus (an uncircumcised Gentile Christian) was taken along as a test case (Gal. 2:1-2). Paul and Barnabas were sent by the church, and evidently God told them to go ahead, even though they knew what God had said about the issue; the Jerusalem apostles and elders “added nothing to me,” Paul said (Gal. 2:6). This endorsement by God of a plan proposed by men reminds us of God telling Moses to send out the spies after the people had requested it (Deut. 1:22; Num. 13:1-2). On their way to Jerusalem, they reported to churches in Phoenicia and Samaria their success in converting Gentiles; all these churches received this as good news and rejoiced over it.

When they arrived in Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas had a private meeting with the apostles and elders (including Peter, John, and Jesus’ brother James) where they ascertained that they were all in agreement, that Titus would not be required to be circumcised, and that the false teachers who came to Antioch had not been sent by the Jerusalem church. All they asked of Paul was to remember the poor at Jerusalem, which he agreed to do (Gal. 2). Roper thinks this private meeting was sandwiched between two public meetings, in the first of which the Pharisees brought up their demands that Gentiles had to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses ( 9). Reese (534), Lenski (600), and Waddey (164) assume the same thing. Perhaps they are right—that the whole church welcomed Paul and Barnabas and invited them to report on their work, and that the Pharisees interrupted with their demand for binding

circumcision and the Law on the new converts, with the result that the meeting was postponed until the leaders had a private conference with Paul and Barnabas. On the other hand, Paul and Barnabas may have been astute enough to anticipate the confrontation with the Pharisees, or may have been warned by God Himself as part of Paul’s revelation (Col. 2:2), and may have gone to the church leaders first to be certain they were in full agreement before confronting the Pharisees. Coffman in his Acts commentary says the Pharisees “had corrupted practically the whole of the church in Judaea” as well as Galatia to some extent (294), and while this probably exaggerates the case, they were sufficiently bold as to give Paul and Barnabas reason to check first with the apostles and elders before “going public.” When they did, they must have been relieved to discover that the apostles and elders did not agree with the Judaizers and had not sent them out to Gentile churches to corrupt them with their Pharisee legalism.

At a more public meeting of the church where Paul and Barnabas reported on their work among the Gentiles, some Pharisees who had been baptized said the Gentiles had to be circumcised and commanded to keep the Law of Moses (Acts 15:5). McGarvey says of these Pharisees,

[W]hen they despaired of destroying the church from without, they deliberately confessed Christ and came into the church for the purpose of controlling it from within. It was their design to keep the church under the bondage of the Law, and thus prevent it from very seriously modifying the state of things among the Jews in which the Pharisees were the predominant party. (59)

If McGarvey is correct in this last statement, it is obvious that they had not been able yet to convert the apostles and elders to their way of thinking.

At a second public meeting for the purpose of settling this issue, there was much discussion, in which the Pharisees no doubt had opportunity to present their case before speeches were made by inspired men. Peter, the first speaker, reminded them that God had

chosen him to preach to the first Gentiles and had given them the Holy Spirit to prove them acceptable without requiring circumcision or adherence to the Law. He also rebuked the Pharisees: “Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they” (Acts 15:10-11). The next speakers were Paul and Barnabas, who told how God had approved their preaching among the Gentiles. James, a brother of Jesus, summed up their conclusion that Gentiles were to be included without becoming Jews, and quoted Amos 9:11-12 as predicting the inclusion of Gentiles along with Jews in the rebuilt tabernacle of David (the church). He recommended that they write a letter to the Gentile churches asking only that they abstain from idolatry, fornication, things strangled, and blood, but not troubling them about circumcision and the Law of Moses. This was done with the approval of the apostles and elders, with the whole church, and brethren were appointed to help Paul and Barnabas deliver the letter, which also stated that the false teachers had not been sent out by the Jerusalem church.

Of the four things they asked the Gentile churches to avoid, two (idolatry and fornication) are condemned in the New Testament everywhere they are brought up. The other two amount to one basic element to be avoided—eating blood—because eating animals that have been strangled and not bled results in eating blood left in the flesh of the animal. Writers seem to have some trouble with the request to abstain from blood; some make no comment on it, and many who try to deal with it are perplexed as to the reason for it. Roper (17-18), Reese (547-548), McGarvey (57), and Boles (245) all think that eating blood is forbidden because it was instituted in Noah’s time and later incorporated into the Law of Moses, making it a prohibition to mankind in general, including Christians. (The very idea of it sickens this writer, who needs no prohibition to abstain.) Boles and Reese suggest that the three points of abstention represent a sort of compromise to keep the Jewish Christians from thinking they had lost everything and gained nothing from the conference. Roper says, “James was, in

effect, saying to Gentile Christians, ‘We Jewish Christians have decided in your favor regarding Gentiles’ keeping the Law. Now do *us* a favor by abstaining from practices that make us uncomfortable’” (18). James stated his reason when he proposed the letter—“For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath” (Acts 15:21). He is saying they should ask the Gentiles to abstain from these things to avoid offending Jews who have been taught the Law of Moses for generations. It is known that non-Christian Gentiles generally were idolaters, that fornication with heathen temple prostitutes was often an act of worship to idolaters, and that drinking blood was sometimes a part of their idolatrous rituals, but surely Gentile Christians would have been taught that these things are wrong before the Jerusalem conference took place.

The procedure at Jerusalem may be summed up as follows: (1) Paul, Barnabas, and company meet privately with the apostles and elders, either first or as soon as the Pharisee demand was made—Acts 15:4 and Galatians 2:2. (2) Paul and Barnabas tell of Gentile conversions—Acts 15:4. (3) Pharisee Christians state the issue as circumcision and the Law—Acts 15:5. (4) Many questions are asked—Acts 15:6-7. (5) Peter tells about Cornelius and rebukes the Pharisees—Acts 15:7-11. (6) Barnabas and Paul tell how God endorsed their work—Acts 15:12. (7) James summarizes, notes fulfillment of prophecy, and recommends a letter assuring Gentiles that they did not have to keep the Law of Moses and asking them to avoid idols, fornication, strangled meat, and blood.

### **The Real Issue Then and Now**

In any situation where there is disagreement, it is important to determine what is the real issue, which is often clouded by concomitant side issues. The immediate demand of the Pharisee Christians was that the Gentile Christians submit to circumcision as a religious ritual—a ritual that obligated them to keep the entire Law of Moses. Paul noted this when he said, “And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole Law” (Gal. 5:3). This has no reference to circumcision as a health need, but to circumcision as an initiatory rite into

Judaism. As baptism puts one into Christ (Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27), so circumcision puts one into Israel or Judaism. As baptism obligates one to obey the Law of Christ (the New Testament), circumcision obligates one to obey the Law of Moses (the Old Testament). The religion of Christ includes some things from the Old Testament because they are eternal principles of God, not because they are written in the Law of Moses. Nine of the ten commandments are just such principles and are carried over into the New Testament; the observance of the Sabbath or seventh day is not. The day of worship for Christians is the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2). It is an anniversary of both the resurrection of Christ (Luke 24:1-3) and of the birthday of the church (Acts 2).

The real issue of what Law Christians are to keep was settled by inspired declaration at the Jerusalem conference, but this decision was rejected by the Judaizers. There were three stages of the Judaistic controversy: first, the Judaizers insisted on the necessity of circumcision, as in Acts 15 and Galatians 2, because it obligated one to keep the whole Law. Next, when their demands were not met, they attacked the apostleship and credentials of Paul (Gal. 1; 2 Cor.), because he was the leader in preaching to Gentiles. And when that did not work for them, they came up with the “chosen people” argument that Paul addresses in Romans; they were God’s chosen people, so their Law was God’s chosen Law. That is why Paul’s theme in Romans is that the Gospel is *the* power of God unto salvation (1:16); he is affirming that nothing else, including the Law of Moses, can save people.

In one way or another, Paul and others would have to battle those who wanted to go back to the Old Testament to justify their religious practices. The Jews attempted to assert their influence in the early church by insisting that one is saved by doing the works of the Law. Paul denied this emphatically in Galatians and Romans, but to a lesser degree he countered it in Philippians and other letters. Hebrews also deals with this issue. The Jewish emphasis was particularly on circumcision, but they had the whole Law in mind. Perhaps they thought they could contain Christianity in Judaism as another sect like Pharisees, Sadducees, or Essenes.

What the Pharisee Christians wanted to do directly in the first century has been achieved indirectly in bits and pieces down through the centuries. Churches have longed for ceremony and pomp, so they have developed clergy classes and robed them like the Old Testament priesthood. They have brought candles, incense, instrumental music, and choirs into their services in imitation of the Old Testament temple worship. They have instituted infant baptism and infant dedication “in the room of circumcision.” They teach that the church was established in Abraham’s time. They laud “Judeo-Christian” principles instead of Gospel principles. Some of them have altars on which they claim that the body of Christ is sacrificed regularly. Many insist on observance of the Sabbath, and even call the first day of the week “the Christian Sabbath.” Some Premillennialists go even further and argue that the Old Testament temple and worship system will yet be reestablished in the millennium. Even some churches of Christ today are not far from allowing divorce for every cause or no cause at all except hardness of hearts.

One might argue that these things are not binding the Law of Moses on Christians, but are just allowing them. What constitutes binding the Law on Christians now? If “John” is a member of a church and the elders decide to have instrumental music and a choir to attract some people, are they binding a part of the Law on John? And if they include candles and incense, is this a binding of a part of the Law on John? What if they have a Seder (a feast commemorating the exodus from Egypt) at Easter (Passover)? How much of the Old Testament would have to be made part of church services before it could be said that the Law is being bound on John, who really has no choice but to participate in the services or go and find another church?

### **Using the Old Testament**

The Jerusalem conference under the leadership of inspired men should have made it clear that Christians are under the Gospel, not the Law of Moses. The doctrine that circumcision and obedience to the Law of Moses were necessary to be saved were rejected as troubling Christians and subverting souls (Acts 15:24). What the



Jerusalem conference declared was also affirmed by later inspired statements: The Gospel, not the Law, is the power of God to save (Rom. 1:16). One is justified by faith apart from works of the Law of Moses (Rom. 3:28). We are dead to the Law of Moses through the body of Christ (Rom. 7:4). To justify yourself by the Law of Moses is to fall away from grace (Gal. 5:4). The Law was nailed to the cross, thus fulfilled and no longer applicable (Col. 2:14-17). Those who would bind the Law on Christians are called dogs, evil workers, mutilators, and enemies of the cross (Philip. 3:2, 18). God speaks to us today through Christ, not through the Law of Moses or the Old Testament (Heb. 1:1-2).

Of what value then is the Old Testament? It is the valid history of God's people under two Laws—Patriarchal and Mosaic. It was the tutor of Jews to bring them to Christ (Gal. 3:24). It taught them (as it should teach us) that God requires obedience. Some of its examples (like the cases of Cain, Balaam, Nadab and Abihu, of Uzzah, and of Saul in 1 Samuel 15) show what obedience really is and help us to understand what God expects in terms of obedience—complete compliance with what God says, exactly what He says, all that He says, and only what He says—without argument, complaint, or substitution. This is what Paul meant when he said, “Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (1 Cor. 10:11); and, “For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope” (Rom. 15:4).

Old Testament prophecy led many Jews to believe in Christ in the early days of the church, and even today by the record of its fulfillment hundreds of years later it leads people to have confidence in the Bible as the word of God. Who can read Isaiah 53 and its fulfillment in the crucifixion of Christ, and not believe it was written at the inspiration of the Holy Spirit? No wonder that the Ethiopian in Acts 8, when he understood who it was talking about, wanted to be baptized, for he knew that Isaiah had written it hundreds of years before.

Some do not appreciate nor even understand much of Old Testament prophecy. The very passage under consideration in this study tells us James quoted Amos 9:11-12 as proof that the Gentiles were acceptable to God without circumcision. Amos had issued many threats and pronounced judgments on idolatrous Israel and her neighbors, declaring that Israel would be sifted among the nations, yet a remnant would be saved. In 9:11-15, Amos said that those who remained after the main body of Israel was destroyed would return from captivity. The tabernacle of David would be rebuilt; the kingdom which had fallen because of sin would be raised up and established again. This reestablishing of David's kingdom is couched in terms of physical prosperity in Amos' writing, but the sense of the passage is caught by James as he cites it from the Greek Old Testament, with emphasis on the inclusion of the nations or Gentiles. That James was not giving his own personal interpretation of Amos 9:11-12 is shown by the agreement of the whole group of inspired leaders and acceptance by the Jerusalem church. The spiritual application was to the church consisting of both Jewish and Gentile members, and the Gentiles did not have to become proselytes. James' statement, “And with this the words of the prophets agree” (Acts 15:15) suggests by the plural form of “prophets” that not only the prophet Amos in the passage quoted applied to their decision, but that the whole tenor of Old Testament prophecy pointed to a spiritual kingdom in which Jews and Gentiles as one could serve the Christ on David's throne. We miss much when we ignore or pass over lightly the writings of the great prophets of the Old Testament.

There is all this and more to be gained from the Old Testament. Many principles—including, as has been mentioned, nine of the ten commandments—are stated again in the New Testament as part of the Law of Christ. The two greatest commandments of loving God supremely and loving your neighbor as yourself (Matt. 22:37-39) are as valid for today's Christian as they were for the children of Israel in Moses' day. The Old Testament principle of requiring two or three witnesses to establish an accusation is still true (1 Tim. 5:19). Paul insists that the role of women in public worship in the church is submission rather than leadership, “as the Law also

says” (1 Cor. 14:34). God’s attitude toward divorce has not really changed from the beginning, though the Pharisees thought it had (Mal. 2:16; Matt. 19:6-8). Many other things could be cited as Christian principles that were also principles under the Law, and some of them principles even before the Law of Moses.

Many New Testament examples and figures require a knowledge of the Old Testament to understand them. In 1 Corinthians 10:18, Paul’s example of eating of the sacrifices requires an understanding of Old Testament sacrifices and their fellowship meals to make it meaningful. To understand 1 Corinthians 10:1-12, one needs to know something about the crossing of the Red Sea and the wilderness wanderings. References to Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Isaac, Jacob, David, Elijah, and others are comprehended by knowing what they did in the Old Testament. Hebrews 11 is full of Old Testament examples. Jesus’ teachings in Matthew 5 and 19 require knowledge of parts of the Law of Moses to be fully useful to us.

### Conclusion

The Jerusalem conference, what led up to it, its procedures, and its results teach us some useful lessons. Its main thrust was to declare that the Gospel, not the Law, is Christianity’s rule: the Old Testament is not to be bound on Christians nor on those who would become Christians. Circumcision is not an issue today, but many other things are, and each proposal must be submitted to New Testament scrutiny. When an issue arises, it must be tested by New Testament Scripture. We can, as they did, take it to apostles and other inspired men who, “being dead, still speak” through their writings in the New Testament. We can debate and discuss an issue, but our conclusions must be supported by the Gospel—the New Testament. Nothing should be bound on people that the New Testament does not bind, and nothing can be omitted that the Gospel does bind. We should not allow anyone to bind either the Old Law or their own tradition on us. We may choose to conform to some tradition that does not matter, as Paul did when he circumcised Timothy, but we should imitate Paul when he refused to circumcise Titus and not allow anyone to force us to obey a

tradition or an Old Testament practice. We can allow brethren to state their case, but they must allow the Gospel side to be presented as well, and we must not allow anyone to foist upon us Old Testament practices not endorsed by the Lord Jesus Christ in His New Covenant.

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### **Biographical Sketch**

Charles J. Aebi is a native of southwestern Pennsylvania. He was raised with a denominational background, but obeyed the gospel in 1949 and began preaching in 1952. He has a B.S. degree from Penn State, an M.A. from Abilene Christian, and a Ph.D. from Ohio University. Charles has served for 58 years as minister for churches in Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas, and West Virginia, and has preached and held workshops in several states and in foreign countries.

He has served as an elder for several years each in three congregations. He currently serves as a minister and an elder at Barlow-Vincent Church of Christ in Vincent, OH. He taught Bible for 34 years at Ohio Valley College (now University), serving 15 years as academic dean and 6 years as chairman of the Bible Department. He retired from the college in 1998 and now teaches at West Virginia School of Preaching.

Charles and his wife Imogene have four children and twelve grandchildren. All of the men in the family preach on occasion; all of the men and women teach Bible classes; and all the grandchildren have obeyed the gospel. Two of the grandchildren are married, five are now students at Christian colleges, and three have graduated from Christian colleges.

# The Philippian Jailor

Acts 16:15-34

Paolo Di Luca

Things do not always go our way! Paul wanted to go to preach in Asia and in Bithynia, but the Holy Spirit forbids it! One night the apostle has a vision: a man from Macedonia is pleading with him: “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” Paul understands this is a



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vision from God, and so “immediately” he looks for a way to Macedonia (Acts 16:6-10). Along with his companions, he sails from Troas to Samothrace first, to Neapolis the following day, and finally arrives at the Roman colony called Philippi.

History informs us of the great importance of this city. Philippi begins in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC when some settlers from the northern Aegean islands move there because of the abundant water resources in that area. Some time later it was discovered that the region was also rich in gold and the village (that was previously named Krenedes—“springs”) experienced a “gold rush” that greatly appealed to Philip II of Macedon (the father of Alexander the Great). Around 358 BC he sent Macedonian soldiers to protect the gold mines and at that time the settlement changed its name to Philippi (from the Greek *philippos*, formed by *philos* meaning *friend* and *hippos* meaning *horse*, therefore, “lover of horses”). Philippi will be brought under Roman rule in 168 BC. But its real importance will arise after 31 BC when Octavian (Gaius Octavius Thurinus, the future Augustus, first Roman Emperor) will grant the city the status of Roman colony because Philippi has been the site

of one of the most significant military engagements in Roman history. In a series of battles (42 BC) Mark Antony and Octavian defeated the army of Cassius and Brutus, the assassins of Julius Caesar. These battles marked the turning point between the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire. In Philippi, the Emperor Augustus will give land properties to the veterans of the civil wars and to the supporters of Mark Antony.

As a Roman colony, the city enjoyed special benefits such as: *Libertas* or self-government; *Immunitas* or freedom from paying tribute to the Emperor; and *Jus Italicum* or the rights of those who lived in Italy, including Roman dress code, language, coinage and holidays. Paul was a Roman citizen (Acts 22:25-29), and he used his rights when he appealed to Caesar (Acts 25:11). At Philippi, Paul used his rights of citizenship for protection (Acts 16:20-21).

As Paul arrives at the city of Philippi he receives the information that “prayer was customarily made” “out of the city to the riverside” (Acts 16:13). So on the Sabbath day the apostle and his companions go to the riverside where they meet some women. One of them, Lydia, is converted along with all of her household (Acts 16:14-15). Following this conversion, Paul continues to preach in the city. One day he meets a girl that was possessed by “a spirit of divination” (Acts 16:16). This girl was a slave in double bondage: by the demon and by her masters. She begins to follow Paul for many days and annoys him by continuing to shout: “These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation” (Acts 16:17-18). Even though she is proclaiming truth, the apostle rejects her cooperation because demons and apostles do not work together (also Jesus did not accept the testimony of demons, cf. Mark 1:23-26). So Paul, in the name of Jesus Christ, commands the evil spirit to come out of her. When her masters see that there was no longer an opportunity to make money from her, they turn the city against Paul (Acts 16:19-24). After being brought in front of the city magistrates, Paul and Silas (without any legal trial) are beaten and thrown into prison to be kept securely. We know that Paul felt really humiliated by this treatment at the point that he will define it “spiteful” or “shameful” in 1 Thessalonians 2:2 (NKJV, KJV, ESV, ASV).

In antiquity, jails were not designed for long term punishment. They were dark chambers where prisoners were held until they could be tried or punished in other ways. Prisoners were commonly chained but the most dangerous prisoners were also restrained by placing their feet in stocks for additional security. Evidently, Paul and Silas were considered to be really dangerous! Regarding ancient Roman prisons, John Henry Newman notes:

The state prison, then, was arranged on pretty much one and the same plan through the Roman empire, nay, we may say, throughout the ancient world. It was commonly attached to the government buildings, and consisted of two parts. The first was the vestibule, or outward prison, which was a hall, approached from the praetorium, and surrounded by cells, opening into it. The prisoners, who were confined in these cells, had the benefit of the air and light, which the hall admitted. . . . From this vestibule there was a passage into the interior prison, called Robur or Lignum, from the beams of wood, which were the instruments of confinement, or from the character of its floor. It had no window or outlet, except this door, which, when closed, absolutely shut out light and air. Air, indeed, and coolness might be obtained for it by the *barathrum*, presently to be spoken of, but of what nature we shall then see. The apartment, called Lignum, was the place into which St. Paul and St. Silas were cast at Philippi, before it was known that they were Romans. . . . The utter darkness, the heat, and the stench of this miserable place, in which the inmates were confined day and night, is often dwelt upon by the martyrs and their biographers. (363-64)

Once incarcerated, the two disciples of Jesus do not get depressed or upset. They have been arrested, beaten and put in prison unjustly. Surely their bodies are hurting, but not their souls. According to Acts 16:25, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God and the prisoners were listening to them. What courage, what a faith! These two Christians had prayers and songs

for God on their lips and in their hearts unlike anything else ever heard in Philippi. What was heard in that building was not the crying and the cursing of condemned convicts or defeated religious fanatics, but the victorious acclamation of redeemed people, of God's soldiers! The two men are well aware that the next day might be their last day on this Earth. They know that their staying in that prison is just temporary, as their enemies are planning for their execution. We can only wonder what were the thoughts and the words of Paul and Silas in that moment. Maybe they were singing: "The LORD gives freedom to the prisoners" (Ps. 146:7) or: "Let the groaning of the prisoner come before You; according to the greatness of Your power preserve those who are appointed to die" (Ps. 97:11) or maybe: "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, because the LORD has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound" (Isa. 61:1). It could be they were praying the words of Zechariah: "As for you also, because of the blood of your covenant, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit. Return to the stronghold, you prisoners of hope. Even today I declare that I will restore double to you" (9:11-12).

While the words of praise and supplication are elevated to the Father in Heaven, at midnight, suddenly there was a great earthquake, so powerful that even the foundations of the prison were shaken. The Almighty Creator of nature's laws, looking down to that scene, shook the prison to its foundation, throwing open the doors and breaking the shackles that were binding the prisoners.

The Philippian jailor was asleep at that late hour. There is a similar situation described in Luke 22:39-46. One man is in agony. In front of Him there is the greatest mission ever accomplished. He is praying the Father for help, but He is willing to accept His whole will! His friends that are with Him are sleeping. An angel appears who gives Him comfort and strength, but His disciples are sleeping. As Jesus is facing the last few hours of His life on this planet, they are sleeping. But God is not sleeping. A few years

after, the jailor was not listening to the hymns and to the prayers of Paul and Silas; he was sleeping!

When he is shaken off his bed, it took him just a fast look at what happened to make a decision. He was a man of decision, both as a soldier and as a jail keeper he learned to not linger in any situation but to make quick decisions! He was well aware that Roman law required the life of the soldier or of the jailor who allowed a prisoner to escape. In Acts 12:19 we have an example of it: Peter is miraculously freed from the prison and “when Herod had searched for him and not found him, he examined the guards and commanded that they should be put to death.”

The Philippian jailor knew that there was no excuse, no possible way out. He was destined to be condemned to death without any trial, and he could never plead innocent. He was not a coward, he was not a weak person. He was proud of having been a good soldier, who had served his Emperor well, and had given glory and honor to the name of Rome. Lately he has served Rome as the jail keeper of the Roman colony of Philippi and he has done a good job! But now, all that was over. Now, he failed in his assignment and he was guilty. When all the doors were opened, the chains fell off, the stocks were separated and every prisoner was loose and able to run away, the whole world of that man was lost. And no matter how he could try to justify himself, blame it on the earthquake; the blame was on him. Things should not end with the humiliation and shame by trial so he makes the decision to kill himself. That night he was going to die, and indeed he died, but not as he was expecting!

He draws the sword and was decided and ready to terminate his life when a voice stops his action: “Do yourself no harm, for we are all here” (Acts 16:28). As suddenly as he was awakened by the earthquake, as suddenly as he understood the situation, as suddenly as he made the tragic decision to kill himself, now, the voice that suddenly comes to him, forces him to make another decision suddenly: “Give me a light” he might have shouted! And with that light he ran to see, and indeed he saw, but not as he was expecting!

That is enough for that Roman soldier. As he sees Paul and Silas freed from the bondage but still in the same cell that he closed

them in just few hours before, he begins to tremble: all is clear, he has no need of more proofs! He quickly associated and ordered all the facts and he concluded that the things he had witnessed were extraordinary and were associated or caused by the God of those two men. He recognizes to be in the presence of men who represent far more power and authority than he has ever known. Even if he has been in many battles and has dealt with violent and aggressive prisoners, he is facing something so overwhelming that he falls at their feet: “But the LORD is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King. At His wrath the earth will tremble, and the nations will not be able to endure His indignation” (Jer. 10:10).

So he immediately acted. Those two men are in the wrong place: “he brought them out” (Acts 16:30a). Their place was not in that dungeon; they were not the real prisoners, but he, their jailor, was! As an honest and loyal man he cannot contain himself and immediately asks the most important question: “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30b).

But what had the jailor really meant with that question? Some have argued that the Philippian jailor had physical deliverance in mind rather than the salvation of his soul, but the evidence does not support that conclusion.

1. The “slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination” had shouted publicly “for many days” that Paul and Silas were men who were proclaiming “the way of salvation” (Acts 16:16-18).
2. The earthquake was already over and he had no physical harm from it. So he could very hardly be seeking “salvation” from that.
3. None of the prisoners had escaped, so his life was no longer in danger from that. It seems the jailor is not concerned at all to secure the prisoners from escaping. Maybe some of his household did that or maybe he figured out that if they had not escaped was by divine intervention and the salvation of his soul was now his supreme concern.

4. The earthquake, the open prison doors, the fact that none of the prisoners ran away, Paul's concern for saving his material life when he was ready to commit suicide—all these things surely made him focus on the salvation of his soul more than his physical deliverance.
5. Paul and Silas clearly understood that the jailor meant spiritual salvation from sin. They could not promise physical deliverance in return for the faith in Jesus Christ.
6. The tender and loving care of the converted jailor toward those two men who have been so brutally abused (Acts 16:33) and the rejoicing that he shared “with all his household” (Acts 16:34) after they all were baptized, indicate that their souls were freed from the guilty conviction of sin.
7. The references to the jailor's household in connection with both Paul's reply and the jailor's conversion (Acts 16:31-34) fully harmonize with the similar references in the conversion of Cornelius (Acts 11:14) and Lydia (Acts 16:15) where the salvation from sin was without question their search.

This pagan Roman soldier really understood! He did not ask explanations of what just happened, and he did not even ask why none of the prisoners escaped. At that point, he was only concerned with making things right with God.

The answer that he receives to his question from Paul and Silas was not just a short magic formula. There is so much more to salvation than just a few ritual words, as we see that the two men of God continued to speak the word of the Lord to him and his household (Acts 16:32). It is obvious that they began their proclamation of the gospel with the words “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ” because that is and should always be the starting point. The whole purpose of Gospel preaching is to bring people to believe in Jesus Christ because “Nor is there salvation in any

other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). The broad instruction, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ” could have not been enough to convince the jailor to rebuke his religious attachment to the pagan gods of Roman mythology. Simply telling the jailor (and anyone else today) to “believe on Jesus” does not provide sufficient information on what God intends with *believe*. In other words, to believe in Jesus involves much more than simply affirming in our minds that Jesus Christ is both Lord and Savior. We are told that this fact is even believed by Satan and his demons (Matt. 4:3, 6; James 2:19). Since “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17), it was only through the proclamation of the word of the Lord that the jailor could understand who Jesus is, what Christianity is about, and which is the proper response to the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

When the word of the Lord is accepted, action is required: “And immediately he and all his family were baptized” (Acts 16:33). Where did the jailor get the idea that he needs to be baptized? Evidently Paul and Silas must have stressed that reality in their speaking “the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house” (Acts 16:32). If baptism is not necessary for the salvation of the soul (as some affirm), why even mention it regarding the conversion of the jailor? Why not simply report that he and his family accepted Jesus as their personal Saviour? Obviously the Holy Spirit inspired Luke to report that “immediately he and all his family were baptized,” in the very middle of the night, because that is a needed step to salvation! The same urgency of action is seen as Philip preached Jesus to the eunuch: the noble man wanted to be baptized immediately (Acts 8:35-38). The same promptness is seen when the 3,000 “were cut to the heart” by the preaching of the apostles about Jesus on Pentecost day: they were immediately baptized (Acts 2:37-41). The same ready response is seen in the conversion of Saul of Tarsus: he was immediately baptized (Acts 9:17-18). Baptism is the immediate action that follows biblical faith in Jesus Christ, the Messiah! In the New Testament people were baptized immediately as they heard the Gospel and had faith in Christ. There was no waiting or delay; there was no such thing

as waiting for a “baptism day.” It was always “straightway,” “the same day,” “the same hour of the night,” or “immediately.” They knew that baptism was necessary to salvation and waiting is nonsense.

But before being immersed this man had to do something special: “And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes” (Acts 16:33). Let us remember that this man was a soldier, a jailor, a harsh person. Until before the earthquake he could care less about Paul and Silas (he was sleeping while they were praying and singing). Now, in a flash, in an instant, he is washing their wounds. What happened here? Evidently he was transformed and shows clear evidence of repentance (Matt. 3:8). The jailor was really convinced by the message of salvation that was preached to him, to the extent that he wants to make things right. That is true repentance: the change of mind that results in the appropriate outward actions (cf. Matt. 21:29; 2 Cor. 7:10). The only thing that could take a hard old Roman jailor and have him wash the wounds of the prisoners that he put into the deep dungeon is when God’s word changes his life. Jesus affirmed: “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). He understood and he acted! Christianity is not just words but requires actions as well. James writes: “Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (2:17).

The final note about the conversion of the Philippian jailor and his household deals with the joy that salvation brings: “and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household” (Acts 16:34). This is the same word that Luke uses in Acts 2:46 to describe the happiness of the early church. The knowledge of having accepted true faith in God and to have begun the consistent walk of faith bring a special joy. At the table of the jailor there was a deep joy as he shares his hospitality to the two prisoners who have become his spiritual brothers. Now he is living what Isaiah describes with these words: “I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels” (Isa. 61:10). Now as he

is eating material food he can relate to Jeremiah’s feelings: “Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; for I am called by Your name, O LORD God of hosts” (Jer. 15:16). Now he can really grasp what Peter will write in his first letter:

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls. (1 Peter 1:6-9)

Now he can fully appreciate what His Lord and Master said to all of His disciples: “These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full” (John 15:11).

What a night! What a roller coaster of emotions! What a radical change of life! What a marvelous salvation!

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#### Biographical Sketch

Paolo was born in Milan, Italy, and was raised in Ferrara, Italy. He is married to the former Cindy Inman, daughter of the late Clifton and Pauline Inman. Clifton was a well-known preacher of the Gospel for 50 years in the Ohio Valley. Paolo and Cindy have one son, Marco, who is a graduate student pursuing a Master in Ministry and is full-time Admission Counsellor at Freed-Hardeman University.



Paolo's biblical education and training have come from various courses of study in Italy and the United States, and from working with his father, the late Gilberto (who preached the Gospel for 50 years in Italy) and other missionaries in Italy.

He preached full-time for various congregations in Italy from 1983 to 2006, at which time he and Cindy decided to move to the United States. Paolo began working with the Bridge Street congregation in New Martinsville, WV, on June 4, 2007.

In addition to pulpit preaching and personal evangelism, Paolo has also prepared and recorded radio programs, participated in public debates, directed Bible camps for children and teenagers, worked (in Italy) with campaign groups from the United States, and participated in numerous other evangelistic activities. He also has been co-editor for various monthly papers, published both on paper and on the Internet, and has maintained two web sites.

# The Remarkable Results

Acts 2:41-47

Frank Higginbotham

The book of Acts is called by some, the hub of the Bible. Prophecies of the Old Testament focus on Acts two as the chapter that brings the fulfillment of the prophecies of the church or kingdom. This was true of the prophecy of Daniel 2:44. Isaiah



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spoke of the last days when God would establish His kingdom in the city of Jerusalem. He was speaking of the things that occurred in Acts two.

The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. And it shall come to pass in the last days, *that* the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. (Isa. 2:1-4)

References to the kingdom after Acts 2 appear in the past tense (Col. 1:13). Thus, we can easily see the importance of the great book of Acts and why some would refer to it as the hub of the Bible. The emphasis in this book is on the conversion of men and women to Christianity and acceptance of the blessing of membership in the Lord's church.

Acts records detailed accounts of the manner in which people were converted to Jesus Christ. It thus becomes a "textbook" on how to become a Christian. McGarvey noted that if one extracted from Acts all of the material that relates either to those who were won to Jesus, or those who refused the gospel, there would be virtually nothing left (xviii).

The Book of Acts tells us of the efforts of the apostles to carry out the instructions given them by the Lord. With the help of God they were able to accomplish great things. "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). With this instruction and the help of God, the apostles were able to take the gospel to the world. "If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and *be* not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, *and* which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister" (Col. 1:23).

The summarization of what the apostles were able to accomplish at that time and what disciples of Christ have done since is found in the last seven verses of the second chapter of Acts. The results were remarkable then and still can be termed remarkable today. This is the topic assigned for the lesson we here present. We first want to look at the great response on that day. "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:41).

After hearing the message presented by the apostles, three thousand people showed their faith by being baptized into Christ. What a great beginning for the church. There are some things we must understand that take place when a person is converted.

First, there can be no conversion without the Word of God. Paul describes the gospel as the power to bring about salvation.

I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith. (Rom. 1:14-17)

In His parable concerning the sower in Luke eight, the Lord made this statement. “Now the parable is this: The seed is the Word of God. Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved” (vv. 11-12). The removal of the Word of God from the heart would prevent this person from being saved. It is important to note that in the Book of Acts the cases of conversion included a reference to the use of the Word of God. Salvation does not come separate from faith in the Word of God.

Second, in helping people to obtain salvation we must convince them that they are guilty of sin. If people do not recognize that they are lost, they do not seek salvation. The people on Pentecost were convicted of the sin of killing the Son of God. “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). The next verse tells us that they were pricked in their hearts. This is just saying that they realized they were guilty of sin. They did not ask what they needed to do until they realized their guilt. They asked, what must we do because they knew their guilt.

A third point that we need to note is the fact that human activity is a vital part of salvation. It seems strange that some spend a great deal of time in advancing parts of Calvinism setting forth the idea that we have no part in obtaining salvation. We are told that Christ has done it all. In an attempt to eliminate the Lord’s command for us to be baptized, some have invented ideas that promote all activity on the part of man as being a work of man that would violate the idea of being saved by grace. Can we be saved by grace and be baptized as an act of obedience to God without presenting a

contradiction? It is clear that no work earns salvation but obedience of no work of God is eliminated. Notice the discussion of this subject: “So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do” (Luke 17:10). It is worthy of note that Peter did not rebuke the people who asked what to do. Modern day preachers would have begun at this point to discourage these people from being baptized. They would have been told that baptism is a work and thus eliminated from salvation but Peter merely told the people what they needed to do to be saved. Look at his answer. “Then Peter said unto them, ‘Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost’” (Act 2:38). Those who gladly received these words responded by being baptized. The number was about three thousand people. What great results!

“And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42). A second remarkable result that we are able to see occurring on the day of Pentecost is seen in the fact that those who were baptized began a faithful participation in worship to God. The object of all worship is God. When Satan attempted to get Jesus to worship him, He responded to the temptation in this way. “Then saith Jesus unto him, ‘Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve’” (Matt 4:10). God deserves our worship. He is worthy. “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created” (Rev. 4:11). In recent years we have faced much criticism in regard to innovations that people have tried to add to the worship of the Lord. Practices are being justified on the basis of what we like. We seem to have forgotten that worship is man’s attempt to please God not to do what pleases us. We may find pleasure in the use of instrumental music but that is not what worship is about. God has the right to tell us what pleases Him and He has done it in this case.

He rejected the sacrifices of Israel and has the right to turn down sacrifices today (Isa. 1; Mal. 1). Four different items of worship were named. The only exception is singing and they observed this as shown by other passages (Matt. 26:30; Eph. 3:19). It is first noted that they continued in the apostle's doctrine. This refers to the teaching they received from God. The "apostles teaching" reveals the standard of authority to which they submitted. Christianity is not a "do your own thing" religion. Let those who ridicule the concept of "pattern authority" be warned.

The term "fellowship" includes the sharing of responsibility in support of the work of the Lord. Fellowship (*koinonia*) may include several facets of common sharing or "joint participation," including the regular giving of their income for the support of the Lord's work (cf. Rom. 15:26; 2 Cor. 9:13 where *koinonia* is rendered contribution in the ASV). There is here a preview of that *oneness* in Christ which later becomes such a prominent New Testament theme.

The breaking of bread has reference to partaking of the communion of our Lord. "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ" (1 Cor. 10:16)? The disciples remembered the Lord in this memorial observance on the first day of each week (Acts 20:7). They also were dedicated to the use of prayer. This refers to man talking to God. Christians realize that there is no success unless we rely on our God. It should not surprise us that this strong reliance on God found its expression in the consistent talking to God. We are urged to pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17). When the early church found themselves in situations they could not handle, they turned to God in prayer. It is important that we remember a part of prayer is the expression of thanks. Prayer is not an SOS. God's people pray always. We can do all things through Christ (Philip. 4:13). The worship of the church was regular. Christianity is not put on and off at will. The word "steadfast" indicates the regular dedication to God and His work was not just a hit and miss situation. Much could be learned today by observing the dedication of the Christians of Acts two. They were faithful in worship. They

practiced just what God authorized. A key passage to be considered in worship is a statement made by Paul. "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Col. 3:17). In our effort to please God, we must realize that He has authority. What we do must be done by the authority He gave His Son. It is not out of order for us to ask and insist that our worship be ordered in harmony with the "name" of Christ.

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen. (Matt. 28:18-20)

If Christ authorized us to practice certain things in worship, we are safe in engaging in that practice. If no authority is sited from Christ, it is presumptuous and wrong. "And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles" (Acts 2:43).

Another remarkable result that we read about in Acts two is the fact that a loving respect for God developed. Solomon concluded that our whole duty here on the earth is to fear God and keep His commandments (Eccl. 13:14). The term "fear" carries with it a reverence and respect that shows complete trust in God. When Peter came to the house of Cornelius he relates a lesson that he had learned. "Then Peter opened *his* mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (Acts 10:35). This fear shows proper respect for God and acceptance of His will. We are urged to serve God in this way. "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God *is* a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:28-29). The church launched out with a great mission and in a

complete trust that they had the help of God in carrying out their work. The remainder of the book of Acts shows how they were successful in the mission God gave them. It is clear that they did not rely on their own strength but on the help God gives.

And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart. (Acts 2:44-46)

The next remarkable result that is recorded in Acts two is that the church drew together in a love that made them very close to each other. Many of the disciples were away from home and had very real needs. Where would they find the answer for this problem? The brethren had the opportunity to act in love. Membership in the body of Christ involves us in family relationship. God is our Father. He has children and each of those children bears a connection to each other. Paul refers to the church as the household of God (Eph. 2:19).

The believers found joy and strength in one another's company, hence, "kept themselves together" (so the imperfect, middle), sharing whatever they possessed. If any one had a particular need, the others rushed to help. What a marvelous spirit this newly formed congregation had! This was not communism, where the state forces a common level of existence upon all; rather, it was a voluntary dispersion of possessions, and only as "any man had need." Some disciples still owned property (see 12:12). But this spirit of generosity is doubtless one of the factors that caused the primitive church to explode in its growth.

In the Galatian letter Paul exhorted Christians to have concern for other Christians as well as those who were not Christian. Christians place other Christians first. "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all *men*, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10). The concern is for the physical welfare of other Christians and concern for their spiritual

growth and development. This love is shown when through weakness a brother falls by the wayside. "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Gal. 6:1). It would be wrong for a Christian to not show compassion and understanding of a brother who fell. If he is able to restore the fallen brother, he has shown the concern expected of us. "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins" (James 5:19-20).

"Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47). It is remarkable that the things that were characteristic of the church in Acts two proved to be the very things that brought favor from God and fellowman. The effort of the child of God is first and foremost to be found pleasing God. "Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort *you* by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, *so* ye would abound more and more" (1 Thess. 4:1).

Pleasing God during this life is essential to being acceptable on Judgment Day. All want to hear the Lord say, "Well done." It is also essential to the growth of the church for there to be a reasonable, favorable reaction from those in the world about us. The work of these brethren brought daily results.

The second chapter of Acts gives us insight into the remarkable results of the church as it did the will of God in the first century. These same results could be placed at the end of this great book. Souls are taught and obey the instruction of the Lord. Faithful worship for the Lord and His people is a regular part of the life of all Christians. Love draws them closer to each other. These faithful brethren found favor with God and with men.

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**Biographical Sketch**

Frank Higginbotham was born in New Martinsville, WV, February 21, 1933. He is the son of Mr. and Mrs. A. G. (Bus) Higginbotham. He was graduated from Magnolia High School in New Martinsville and from Florida Christian College in Tampa, FL. First located work was with the Columbia Street Church of Christ in Fairmont, WV. From there he worked with the church in Wellsburg and the West Street church in Weirton, WV. In 1964 he moved to the Virginia Avenue Church of Christ in Chester, WV and is currently in his 46 year with this congregation. Frank has done radio and TV preaching and has been preaching for 58 years. He is speaker at this time for 'Bible Meditations'. This 15-minute program is produced five days a week and has been on the air since 1949. He preaches on various lecture programs and conducts 8 to 10 meetings a year. Frank is married to Rose Marie (King) Higginbotham and they are the parents of three children. Donna (passed away in 1965), Janie Gallagher who is married to Brent Gallagher (the preacher for the Oakwood Road Church of Christ in Fairmont) and Steve who is the preacher for the Karns Church of Christ, Knoxville, TN. The Higginbotham's have seven grandchildren.

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