

# ACTS

## ACTS 1 — FROM RESURRECTION TO PENTECOST

Following our plan in the preceding books, we waive the consideration of the human authorship of the Acts and other questions of Biblical introduction and enter at once on the text. It is assumed from verses one and two compared with the opening verses of the third gospel, that "Luke, the beloved physician" (~~5044~~Colossians 4:14), was the author chosen by the Holy Spirit. It is also assumed from verse two, that it is not so much the acts of the apostles he here records, as the acts of Jesus Christ through the apostles in the power of the Holy Spirit.

These two verses constitute the first division of our lesson. The second includes verses 3-11, being an outline of the events from the resurrection to the ascension. The features to note are

- (1) the evidence of Christ's bodily resurrection (v. 3), accentuated by His mingling with the disciples for six weeks;
- (2) the teachings "pertaining to the Kingdom of God" (vv. 4-8);
- (3) the Ascension (v. 9); and
- (4) the promise of His return (vv. 10-11).

Under point two above, our Lord taught three things: first, the distinction between receiving the Holy Spirit and the baptism of the Holy Spirit (vv. 4-5); secondly, the distinction between the church of Christ and the kingdom of Israel (vv. 6-7); and thirdly, the distinction between the evangelization and the conversion of the world (v. 8).

As to the first of these three things, these disciples had previously received the Holy Spirit in regeneration or else they were not His disciples at all (to say nothing of the specific experience in ~~4312~~John 20:22), yet they were to be "baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days hence." As to the second of the things, the kingdom of Israel promised in the Old Testament, and of

which so much has been said in previous lessons, was not immediately to be set up, the church of Christ was to take its place for the time being, but that did not mean that the promise concerning it had failed. It was coming on the earth, but "the times" and the "seasons" were in the Father's keeping. Witnessing unto Christ was left for the disciples in the meantime, but nothing was said about waiting for the conversion of the world before that witness could have accomplished its purpose. As to the Ascension, the probability is that the "cloud" was not the vaporous material of which we are cognizant, but the Shekinah Glory which overshadowed Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration. The testimony of the angels to his return shows that it will be a personal in the sense of a visible appearing.

The remainder of the chapter requires but little explanation. The "upper room" (v. 13) may have been the same as that in <sup><4309></sup>John 20:19. Observe the presence of Mary and the brethren of Jesus (v. 14) with the others, and in no position of superiority whatever. The "scripture" Peter refers to (v. 20) is <sup><4901></sup>Psalms 69:25 and 109:8. That he should have been so intelligent and positive in his position is probably explained by such post-resurrection teaching of Jesus as <sup><4247></sup>Luke 24:27, 46, and verse 3 of this same chapter. There is no contradiction between verse 18 and <sup><4175></sup>Matthew 27:5, as doubtless the rope broke by which the traitor hanged himself. Notice the qualifications for an apostle (v. 21). The "lot" was legitimate at that time, as the disciples were still on Old Testament ground (<sup><1633></sup>Proverbs 16:33), but for us to use it would not be equally so, as we have the complete Word of God and the Holy Spirit to lead us into the meaning of it.

## QUESTIONS

1. Who was the human author of this book?
2. How does the text lead to that conclusion?
3. What four things are included in the second division of this lesson?
4. What three things did Jesus teach pertaining to the Kingdom of God?
5. What "cloud" may that have been in which our Lord ascended?
6. What is the testimony of the angels as to the character of His Second Coming?
7. What explains Peter's intelligent leadership in the choice of Matthias?

## ACTS 2 — THE FORMATION OF THE CHURCH

### THE DESCENT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (VV. 1-4)

The Day of Pentecost alludes to the Levitical feast, with which we became acquainted in the Old Testament. The word is Greek, meaning fifty, the feast occurring fifty days after the offering of the barley sheaf in the Passover feast. It commemorated the wheat harvest and was sometimes called "the Feast of harvest" (<sup><0236></sup>Exodus 33:16), or "the Feast of Weeks," (<sup><0242></sup>Exodus 34:22), or the "Day of the First Fruits" (<sup><0235></sup>Numbers 28:26). After the Babylonian captivity it came to commemorate the giving of the law on Matthew Sinai. There is reason to believe that on this occasion it occurred on the Lord's Day, which explains the declaration in verse one. The "wind," the "tongues" and the "fire" were not the Holy Spirit but the signs of His advent. Their being "filled with the Holy Ghost" was the fulfillment of <sup><0182></sup>Matthew 3:2; <sup><0113></sup>Luke 11:13; <sup><0133></sup>John 1:33; 7:37-39; 14:16-17; <sup><0405></sup>Acts 1:5; etc. This was the gift of the Spirit, the promised Comforter, the baptism of the Holy Spirit. He came to dwell in the believers individually, and yet that individual indwelling by the Spirit, naturally resulted in a corporate work, uniting them all in one body which is the church of Christ (<sup><0213></sup>1 Corinthians 12:13). Since that day, whenever a sinner believes on the Lord Jesus Christ, he shares in that baptism and becomes a member of that one body, of which Christ is the head (<sup><0169></sup>1 Corinthians 6:19; <sup><0023></sup>Ephesians 1:23; 4:3-6). From a scriptural point of view, it is therefore improper for a believer to pray for the gift of the Spirit, or for a greater baptism of the Spirit, because these blessings are already his; but it is different with reference to being filled with the Spirit, if one may judge by <sup><0408></sup>Acts 4:8, 31; 6:5; 7:55; <sup><0158></sup>Ephesians 5:18.

### IMMEDIATE EFFECTS (VV. 5-13)

The first of these was given in verse four, the speaking "with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance"; the second was the coming together of the multitude in consequence of this, and the third, the conclusion the latter reached. As to the first, the thought is that the disciples not of their own volition, but as instruments of the Holy Spirit, proclaimed not the gospel as such, but the praises of God in various languages theretofore unknown to them. Their act had been symbolized in the cloven tongue of fire that had sat upon each, and it prophesied that the Holy Spirit had come to make

known through them the Gospel to all nations under heaven. It is not likely that they continued thus to speak in different tongues. In <sup><4406></sup>Acts 10:46 it is referred to again as an evidence that the Gentiles had received the gift of the Holy Ghost the same as the Jews had on the Day of Pentecost, and in <sup><4496></sup>Acts 19:6 it shows that the Jewish disciples of John had received it, but beyond this it is not named further and these were all special and initial cases. The passage in 1 Corinthians 14 will be considered when it is reached. In the meantime a caution is necessary because phenomena of this character can so easily be counterfeited by evil spirits.

### **PETER'S DISCOURSE (VV. 14-36)**

This may be divided at each of the verses where he directly addresses his hearers: "Ye men of Judea" (v. 14); "Ye men of Israel" (v. 22); "Men and Brethren," or simply "Brethren" (v. 29 RV). In the first division he disposes of the charge of drunkenness, and shows the relation of that which had occurred to the prophecy of <sup><3928></sup>Joel 2:28-29. He does not say that Pentecost completely fulfilled that prophecy, which will not finish until the end of the age, but it was a foretaste. In the second division, he describes the death of Christ and charges that sin upon them; and in the third, he affirms His resurrection as proven by the scriptures, by the testimony of the disciples who were its eyewitnesses (<sup><3961></sup>Psalm 16), and by the event that was just transpiring.

The First Converts (vv. 37-47)

Peter exhorted the people to repent of their sins (which included crucifying Jesus Christ) and be baptized. Three thousand people responded to his preaching and became Christians that day; thus the Christian church began.

### **QUESTIONS**

1. What does Pentecost mean and to what does the feast allude?
2. Have you re-examined the New Testament scriptures which predicted this event?
3. How does <sup><4623></sup>1 Corinthians 12:13 explain this event?
4. What is the thought of verse four?
5. Of what was their act at once a symbol and a prophecy?
6. Why is a caution necessary about speaking with tongues?

## 7. Analyze Peter's discourse.

**ACTS 3-4:30 — THE KINGDOM OFFER RENEWED**

The disciples are still in Jerusalem, and the preaching is still limited to Jewish hearers. In a sense we are still on Old Testament ground. An illustration of this is found in the previous lesson, for example, in 2:38 to "repent and be baptized" was essential "for the remission of sins" and to "receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." But this is no longer so when the Gentiles are approached (10:44-48). The Jews who had openly rejected Jesus must openly accept Him in order to receive the blessing, but with the others grace deals in a different way. That is not to say that repentance and baptism are not necessary; repentance is always involved in saving faith; but baptism now follows the gift of the Spirit as a sign of it, rather than precedes it as a condition.

As a further illustration of Old Testament conditions the disciples are still worshipping in the Temple (v. 1), at one of whose gates this miracle occurs in the Name of the rejected and now risen One (vv. 2-11). It is Peter's discourse in this case that justifies the title of this lesson, especially verses 19-26. This work had not been wrought in the names of the apostles but in Christ's Name, Whom they had crucified (vv. 12-16). This fulfilled prophecy (vv. 17-18). Let them now repent that the Lord may "send the Messiah who hath been appointed for you" (v. 20 RV). The inference from all this to the end of the chapter is that had they as a nation repented, the Messiah would have returned at that time to set up His kingdom in Israel.

But the opposite took place as indicated in the next chapter, the facts of which are

- (1) the arrest of Peter and John (vv. 1-3);
- (2) their defense (vv. 5-12);
- (3) their threatening and their deliverance (vv. 13-22); and
- (4) their return "to their own company" with the spiritual quickening that followed (vv. 23-30).

## QUESTIONS

1. What is to be remembered in the study of this part of the Acts?
2. Give an illustration of this from the preceding chapter.
3. Also from this lesson.
4. What justifies the title of this lesson?
5. What inference is deducible from this?

## ACTS 4:21-5:42 — VARIED EXPERIENCES

### UNITY OF LOVE (4:31-37)

The quickening in the last lesson was associated with another outpouring of the Holy Spirit but not another "baptism," and some who had been filled before were refilled, with results following:

- (1) courage in preaching (v. 31);
- (2) unity of soul (v. 32);
- (3) power in testimony (v. 33); and
- (4) love in practical conduct (vv. 34-37). This last result has sometimes been quoted as favoring Christian communism, but it is to be remembered that it was voluntary in origin, temporary in duration, and limited in its application. Where such communism is the result of the work of the Holy Spirit on regenerated hearts, and accompanied by such fruit as it here revealed, no one need have any apprehension in regard to it.

### PRIDE AND HYPOCRISY (5:1-11)

But there is mildew in every garden, and the opening of the next chapter shows its presence here. Notice in verse three the testimony to the personality and power of Satan, and the personality and Deity of the Holy Spirit. One can not "lie" to an "influence" or a mere "principle of good." Moreover, in verse five the Holy Spirit is identified as God. The penalty on Ananias and Sapphira does not necessarily involve eternal retribution, inasmuch as, notwithstanding their sin, they may have been in vital relationship to God through faith in Christ (~~GEN~~ 1 John 1:8). But it is an

illustration of God's chastening His people on earth, paralleled by the cases of Nadab and Abihu and Achan in the Old Testament (Leviticus 10; Joshua 7), and the Corinthians in the New Testament (~~4113~~1 Corinthians 11:30-32). (Compare here ~~4156~~1 John 5:16.)

### **POWER AND PERSECUTION (5:12-42)**

Note in passing, the continued growth of the church (v. 14); the unusual nature of the signs wrought by Peter (v. 15); the continued enmity of the Sadducees because the apostles preached the resurrection (vv. 17-18); the supernatural deliverance (vv. 19-24); the defense before the Sanhedrin (vv. 25-32); the unexpected advocate (vv. 33-39); the penalty (v. 40); the effect on the apostles and the church (vv. 41-42).

### **QUESTIONS**

1. What were the results of the filling with the Holy Ghost?
2. What are the distinctions between the charity of the early church and the modern communism?
3. What sin in the heart led to the open hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira?
4. How is the Deity of the Holy Spirit proven in this lesson?
5. Is there a distinction between the Divine retribution of the unbelieving and the Divine chastening of the followers of Christ?
6. Give some Old and New Testament illustrations of the latter.
7. Give in your own words the story told above under the head of "Power and Persecution."

## **ACTS 6-7 — FIRST CHRISTIAN MARTYR**

The church was being blessed and multiplied but the conditions were not perfect. The flesh was asserting itself. Verse 1 carries us back to the close of chapter 4, and we see that the charity which led to hypocrisy there, led to "murmuring" here. "Grecians" should be translated "Grecian Jews" to distinguish them from the native born. The apostles who had been distributing the alms could do so no longer, and hence the institution of the office of "deacon" (v. 5), after the Greek of "serve tables" (v. 2). (It is interesting that their names are all Greek.) Note, the exalted nature of the

Christian ministry (v. 4), the high qualifications of those who even should carry on the secondary work of that ministry (v. 3), the democratic nature of the church assembly, and yet the respect for order and authority (v. 6). The whole multitude selected the deacons, but the Apostles ordained them. Note also the direction in which the truth of the gospel was now advancing (v. 7).

The above leads up to the personal history of Stephen, whose ministry was not limited to that of an almoner, and who was endued with miraculous power (v. 8). Verse 9 is explained by the fact that in addition to the Temple in Jerusalem there were many synagogues, where the Jews from different countries assembled according to local preferences. (The Libertines were Jews from Rome). "The servant is not greater than his Master," and if false witnesses caused the death of the One, the other should not expect different treatment (vv. 11-14), but the master has not forsaken his servant (v. 15).

The defense of Stephen before the Sanhedrin (chap. 7) is a historical address carrying his hearers through the glory of God's dealings with Israel from the call of Abraham to the building of Solomon's Temple, with special emphasis being laid on Joseph and Moses who were remarkable types of Christ (vv. 2-50). One instinctively feels that he was proceeding to a climax in his witness to Christ and the resurrection, when he was diverted by the gathering opposition of his hearers, and broke off in the language of rebuke at verses 51-53. Their fury vented itself upon him at this time (vv. 54, 57-58); but he was marvelously sustained, and had a marvellous testimony to bear of what he saw, which enabled him, as his Savior before him, to pray for the forgiveness of his murderers with his last breath.

A comparison of Stephen's words with the Old Testament records show certain variations, but the Holy Spirit through him may have been adding details to that record. On the other hand, Stephen was a Grecian Jew, using doubtless the Septuagint or Greek translation of the Old Testament, which would explain some things.

Note in verse 55 the first manifestation of the glorified Christ on record. Note in verse 58 the illegality of Stephen's judges when compared with ~~<DIS>~~ Luke 18:31. Also note in the same verse the presence of Saul, who, in a sense, owed his conversion to this scene, and of whom we are soon to learn more (see 22:20).



The second offer of the kingdom to Israel is brought to an end here, and in our next lesson we enter on the transition period through which the story of the church passes out of the Jewish into its Gentile stage.

Note in closing, that the name "Jesus" (v. 45), should be rendered as in the RV "Joshua," the two in the original being the same.

## QUESTIONS

1. To what earlier event in the history of the church is the opening of this lesson related?
2. What is the significance of Grecians in 6:1?
3. Whence does the word "deacon" originate?
4. What distinguished men of Israel were now uniting with the church?
5. What is the interpretation to be put upon the synagogues of the Cyrenians, etc.?
6. What was the character of Stephen's defense before the Sanhedrin?
7. What important epoch is thought to have come to an end at this time?

## ACTS 8-9:30— TRANSITION PERIOD

We explained in the last lesson the meaning of the transition period which continues to chapter 13. The first sentence in chapter 8 is more properly the concluding one of chapter 7, although it introduces the account of the persecution following in which Saul was the leader (8:1-3). With the account of this persecution (compare ~~STUD~~ Hebrews 10:32-34), and for Saul's part in it, see ~~ACTS~~ Acts 22:4, 19-20; 24:10-11 and parallel places.

"The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church," as the results in verses 4-8 bear witness. Notice in this case that every one was a preacher, somewhat as in the later instances of the Waldenses and Huguenots.

~~STUD~~ John 4:42 shows how the soil had been prepared in Samaria. Miracles were in order here because the New Testament had not come into existence, but in our day faith in the Word of God is substituted for them.

Simon, or "Simon Magus," was one of Satan's instruments to anticipate the coming of the gospel and counterfeit God's power (vv. 9-11). See ~~STUD~~ 2

Thessalonians 2:9 for the multiplication of such persons towards the end of the age. His pretended faith deceives even Philip (v. 13).

Verses 14-17 have lead to error in two directions. Some teach from it that one may believe in Christ and yet not possess the Holy Spirit, and whose reception it is claimed is distinct from conversion. Others affirm that the laying on of hands as in the rites of confirmation and ordination are needful to His reception. The correction of these things is found in the dispensational character of this part of the book. The Samaritans who had a controversy with the Jews (~~409~~John 4:19-24) had to be identified with those in Jerusalem, after their conversion, hence the gift of the Holy Spirit was withheld in their case till Jerusalem sent the apostles to them.

Peter uses the "keys" here as with the Jews on the day of Pentecost and the Gentiles later in the case of Cornelius (~~400~~Acts 10). Nowhere in the New Testament is it taught that the believer on Christ should seek the gift of the Holy Spirit afterward, nor that He is to be received only by the laying on of hands. The believer may be "filled with the Spirit" many times, but the Spirit comes to dwell in him once and forever.

"Simony" is the name given to the offence of the impostor recorded in vv. 18-24, and it stands for any attempt to make merchandise of the gifts of God. In so far as Christian Science, claiming to be a divine religion, seeks pay for its healing benefits, it is guilty of this sin.

The remainder of the chapter is quite plain. All must be impressed with Philip's obedience (vv. 26-27), tact, intelligence (vv. 30-35) and success (v. 38) as a soul-winner, but the explanation is that he was "full of the Holy Ghost" (6:3). Verse 37 is omitted in the Revised Version as not belonging to the text. It states a great and important truth, but it anticipates the later teaching of Christianity which was given Paul to reveal (~~400~~Acts 9:20; ~~4012~~Galatians 1:12). The catching away of Philip (v. 39) suggests ~~5047~~1 Thessalonians 4:17, and is a type of that which will occur when the church as a whole has finished her labors here, and will be translated to "meet the Lord in the air."

We include the conversion of Saul in this lesson, as the opening of chapter 9 leads us back to that of chapter 8, showing the intervening narrative as a parenthesis. With the exception of the descent of the Holy Spirit, the conversion of Saul is the most important event in the book. For something of his early history see ~~423~~Acts 22:3, 28; 23:6; ~~4013~~Galatians 1:13-14;

<1185>Philippians 3:5-6. What happened on the way to Damascus was unique (vv. 3-7), and will not be repeated until <3820>Zechariah 12:10 is fulfilled at the end of this age. It is related twice again, and with more detail, in chapters 22:5-16; 24:12-18. The "light out of heaven" (9:3) was doubtless the Glory of the Lord, but later on it is the Lord Himself who appears unto Saul. For proof of this cross-reference verse 5 with verses 17 and 27 of the same chapter (also 26:16; <400>1 Corinthians 9:1; 15:8-9).

Note the identification of the Lord and His people, the Head and the members of the body in the words, "Why persecutest thou Me?" Note the correspondence in the two visions to Saul and to Ananias (vv. 6, 10-16), which establishes the actuality of the occurrence. Note the particularities of God's knowledge of man, — the name of Ananias, the city, the street, the house in which he dwelt, the name of Saul, his birthplace, his present occupation! How real and startling it all is! And Ananias is an ordinary disciple, not an apostle, to whom the great commission is accorded (<400>Galatians 1:1). Note the first indication of what Paul's mission is to be (v. 15). Note that he was first filled with the Spirit and afterward baptized (vv. 17-18), which was different from <403>Acts 2:38; 8:16 and 10:44. Evidently had there been uniformity in all these cases it would have resulted in the belief that to receive the Spirit, the same method always must be followed, which has to be avoided. It is to be remembered that these cases were all unique as taking place in the Jewish and the transition stages, while the present method of receiving the Spirit is revealed in <403>Ephesians 1:13.

We pass over the remainder of this story except to notice verse 23. The many days doubtless included the journey to Arabia and back spoken of in <407>Galatians 1:17, and which will be treated when that epistle is reached.

## QUESTIONS

1. What is meant by the transition period?
2. Have you carefully examined the other scriptures referred to in this lesson?
3. What is now substituted for miracles?
4. In what two directions as the translation in 8:14-17 led to error?
5. In what is the correction found?
6. What is "simony"?

7. What marks Philip as a soul-winner?
8. What is suggested by his being caught away?
9. What comparison is made between the conversion of Saul and other events in this book?
10. How is God's knowledge of our intimate life shown in this lesson?
11. What did we note about receiving the Holy Spirit?
12. What is included in the "Many days" of 9:23?

## ACTS 9:31-11:18 — DOOR OPENED TO GENTILES

The closing of chapter 9 shows Peter on a tour of visitation, and the instrument of two great miracles, it being significant that the greater of the two was in answer to prayer (v. 40). Almost all the commentators regard these miracles as having a bearing on the crisis of the church recorded in the next chapter. In that chapter Peter is again to use the "keys," this time in opening the door of the gospel to the Gentiles. Indeed, since the occupation of a tanner was unclean in the eyes of a Jew because of the handling of the skins of dead animals, it is seen that Peter in Joppa is already breaking with the customs of his nation.

As an introduction to chapter 10, carefully read <sup><401></sup>Ephesians 2:11-18. Note, in passing, that the Caesarea in this case was not that of <sup><402></sup>Matthew 16, but another city of the same name located near Joppa, which the Emperor Augustus gave to Herod, and which the latter greatly beautified.

The description of Cornelius (vv. 1-8), shows this Gentile Roman soldier very near the kingdom of God, and an example of how God will reveal more light to any man who lives up to the light he has. But the need of this "more light" in the sense of the knowledge and acceptance of Jesus Christ as a Savior, is also revealed with equal clearness.

Passing to the vision of Peter (vv. 9-23), the "vessel" represents the Christian church; the "four corners," the four corners of the earth; the clean animals, the Jews; the unclean, the Gentiles. In the church however, all are cleansed (read here <sup><4151></sup>2 Corinthians 6:11 and <sup><416></sup>Ephesians 3:6). The Lord providentially interprets the vision in verse 17-20. Note the proof of the personality of the Holy Spirit found in verses 19-20: "the Spirit said... I have sent them."

We are now in the centurion's house and listening to Peter's sermon (vv. 24-43). He has had his eyes opened to the great truth expressed in v. 34. This does not mean that any man merits God's acceptance by his natural morality, for the true fear of God and the working of righteousness are always the result of His grace. It means that God vouchsafes this grace to men of every nation, whether Gentile or Jew. Verse 43 emphasizes this, being the first echo of [John 3:16](#) in the history of the church.

That the household of Cornelius acted on this promise by faith is seen in the result (vv. 44-48), which demonstrates that the Holy Spirit is given to men without either water baptism or the laying on of hands, but simply by believing ([Galatians 2:2](#)). Water baptism followed, but not as an act of Peter himself as is worth noticing (v. 48).

The next chapter indicates that party spirit showed itself early in the church. "They that were of the circumcision" (11:2), means the Palestinian Jews as distinguished from the Grecian Jews or "Hellenists" as they were sometimes called, and who were born in Greece. The priests and the Pharisees belonged to the former who were more zealous for the letter of the mosaic law than the others ([Acts 21:20](#)). As we shall see later (chap. 15), they thought it necessary for a Gentile to become a Jew before he could be saved i.e., he must submit to be circumcised at least. But Peter rehearses all the circumstances in the case of Cornelius, and at this junction they appear to be more than satisfied (v. 18).

## QUESTIONS

1. Name the two miracles of Peter at the close of chapter 9.
2. What is Peter about to do in chapter 10?
3. Have you read [Ephesians 2:11-18](#)?
4. Give a brief history of Caesarea.
5. What does the history of Cornelius teach?
6. Explain the housetop vision.
7. What proof of the personality of the Holy Spirit is here found?
8. How is 10:34 to be interpreted?
9. How is the gift of the Holy Spirit received?
10. What distinguished the Palestinian Jews from the Hellenists?

## ACTS 11:19-13:3 — THE CHURCH AT ANTIOCH

By connecting the first verse of this lesson with 8:4, it will be seen that all intervening is a parenthesis, an important one indeed, but making it necessary now to return to the martyrdom of Stephen for a new start. Be sure to consult a map for the localities in verses 19-20. Antioch, now coming into prominence as the headquarters of the Gentile church, was a beautiful and influential city, but luxurious and immoral. It was founded about 300 B.C. Saul's great life work really begins here (v. 25), and here also the name of Christianity takes its rise (v. 26). Antioch is said to have been famous for its witty epigrams, and it is thought that such was the origin of the name "Christian." The church there was richer in this world's good than at Jerusalem, which enabled the Christians to show the beautiful spirit of verse 29.

Another parenthesis meets us at chapter 12, the closing verse of which brings us back to Antioch. Chapter 12 is of events in Jerusalem, the martyrdom of James by Herod, the imprisonment and deliverance of Peter, and the fate of the wicked king.

To begin with the last-named. Four Herods are mentioned in the New Testament, Herod the Great who killed the innocents in Bethlehem, Herod who killed John the Baptist, this Herod, and him before whom Paul stood later on.

The story of this, the second persecution of the church is told in verses 1-5. The James here mentioned was the one honored by our Lord on the Mount of Transfiguration, and in Gethsemane. See also the memorable circumstance in <sup>AMBS</sup>Matthew 20:23. Peter was now the only apostle remaining in Jerusalem. The four quaternions, sixteen soldiers, "to keep him" suggest that the enemies of the church in Jerusalem had not forgotten his earlier deliverance (chap. 4).

The story of the present deliverance is told in verses 6-17, and is so plain we need not dwell upon it.

The judgment on Herod (vv. 18-23), suggests to some "the presumption and fate of the Antichrist," who also will persecute the Jewish saints, claim divine honors and assume the place of God (<sup>AMB</sup>2 Thessalonians 2:3-8).

In verses 24-25 Barnabas and Saul have returned from their mission of bearing the alms of Antioch to Jerusalem and have brought John Mark with them.

It is now that Antioch comes to the front as the second great center of Christianity, and with it Paul, no longer called Saul, the great apostle to the Gentiles. The time is supposed to be toward the spring of A.O. 46. Verses 1-3 tell the story. Five names are given, one of them very prominent in social circles — Manaen, a foster-brother of Herod. Note the phrase "they ministered to the Lord." How? Just by quiet worship. And, oh! who can measure the results to the church and to the world that came of it! What a contrast with the present day "movements" of one kind and another, the banquets, conventions, newspaper advertisings, photos, and "whoop 'em up" song services, to say nothing of meetings for the so-called deepening of the spiritual life. The simplicity of ministering to the Lord strikes us here, and the circumstance that He Himself is present to guide into large things through the voice of His Spirit, Who can be recognized by all who are holy enough and quiet enough to hear.

The laying on of hands in this case is hardly identical with modern "ordination," but simply the testimony of the church to the genuineness of the call that had been received, and their outwardly expressed "fellowship and identification with the two" who had thus been set apart by the Holy Spirit. This is the way all true missionary work should begin, and the only way to insure a blessing.

## QUESTIONS

1. With what earlier event is this lesson connected?
2. Have you located the cities on the map?
3. What do you know about Antioch?
4. To what locality do the events of chapter 12 belong?
5. Name these events.
6. Identify the different Herods.
7. Identify James, the first of the apostles to suffer martyrdom.
8. Of Whom may this Herod be taken as a type, and in what particular?
9. At what date did the great work of missions to the Gentiles begin?
10. What is here meant by ministering to the Lord?

## ACTS 13:4-14 — PAUL'S FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY

Note who was the real inspirer and director of this missionary journey "sent forth by the Holy Ghost" (v. 4). This does not contradict the last phrase of the preceding verse which, properly rendered, is "they let them go." Study the localities of Seleucia and Cyprus on the map. What was the first port of Cyprus at which they preached (v. 5)? Note that they began their work in the synagogues because it was the Divine order to preach to the Jew first (<sup><5016></sup>Romans 1:16), and because this assured them a waiting audience. The kind of ministry John Mark rendered is not stated, and some think it may have been of a domestic or personal kind. The emphasis in this part of the journey is on the events in Paphos, which place the student should identify. Those versed in dispensational matters speak of Elymas as a type of apostate Judaism which has turned away from the truth and perverts the right ways of the Lord. As he tried to keep the Word of God from the Roman governor, so the Jews tried to keep it from the Gentiles as a class; while on the other hand the judgment falling on him is also significant. Blindness has been put upon the Jews judicially, and they are groping in the darkness without a leader. Compare the story (13:6-1) with such a passage as <sup><2019></sup>Isaiah 6:9-10, for example.

leaving the island for the continent of Asia Minor at verse 13, we find that verse to contain two interesting things. Paul is now first called by that name and begins to take the first place in the narrative as compared with Barnabas or any other fellow-worker. Also John Mark is pointed out as a deserter for some cause, just what is not known. Here see <sup><4153></sup>Acts 15:38 and <sup><5011></sup>2 Timothy 4:11, the first of which shows that Mark was to be blamed, and the second that he was subsequently restored to Paul's fellowship. The word Paul means "little," but why it was now assumed by him is not known, except it be as expressing his estimate of himself spiritually.

Antioch in Pisidia (v. 14) was a region sometimes known as Galatia and as one of Paul's most important epistles was sent there it gives special interest to this part of the story. Furthermore we have here a sample of Paul's preaching as in the case of Peter at Pentecost, and also an intimation of how he found access to the people in the synagogues. The order of exercises there is given in verse 15. From verses 16-41 is the sermon,



which differs from Peter's in an important way. Peter addressed the Jews distinctively, and before the final offer of the kingdom was withdrawn from them for the time being, and hence he offered forgiveness on the ground of repentance and baptism. But Paul speaking to Gentiles as well as Jews, and proclaiming the gospel of grace as distinguished from that of the kingdom, "utters a truth for the first time which Peter did not declare" (v. 39). See comments on chapter 3.

The sermon breaks itself up into three parts: a historical retrospect (vv. 16-25), an unveiling of the gospel (vv. 26-39), and a warning (vv. 40-41). "Ye that fear God" in contrast with "Men of Israel" (v. 16), means the devout Gentiles who sometimes worshipped in the synagogues. Observe that while Paul addresses himself chiefly to the Jews (v. 23), yet true to his commission these others are not forgotten — "Whosoever among you feareth God" (v. 26). The gospel part of the sermon is a model for all time, a statement of facts (vv. 27-31), a glorious declaration based upon them and buttressed by holy writ (vv. 32-37), and the whole pressed home in a personal application (vv. 38-39). The warning seems to have been drawn forth as was that of Stephen, by a spirit of opposition rising among his hearers.

The effects of the sermon are pointed out in verses 42-44, both Jews and Gentiles having been impressed, some of whom were saved. The next week shows a change in the situation explained in verses 44-48. "Ordained" in the last-named verse is not to be interpreted as an arbitrary act on God's part, although it remains true that their acceptance of eternal life by faith shows that He had chosen them to that end. There was a wide work of evangelization in this place (v. 49), but at length the gospel messengers were forced out in to other regions (v. 50). "Devout and honorable women," means doubtless Jewish worshippers who were wives of the rulers of the city.

We need not dwell on the story of Iconium (14:1-5) except that the missionaries abode there a long time before persecution drove them forth, and that a great multitude of both Jews and Gentiles believed.

The events at Lystra are full of dramatic movement (vv. 6-20). The supernatural deliverance of Paul suggests <sup><RB6></sup>Job 2:6. But is it not amazing that they should have returned, without fear, through the cities in which they had so recently suffered persecution (v. 21). Some have calculated that the whole of this journey covered about a year and a half.

## QUESTIONS

1. Who originated this missionary journey?
2. What geographical relation does Cyprus bear to Syria and Asia Minor?
3. In what sense may Elymas be spoken of as a type?
4. What is the meaning of the name Paul?
5. Describe the simple service of the synagogue.
6. Analyze Paul's sermon at Antioch.
7. Give the story of Lystra in your own words.

## ACTS 15:1-35 — FIRST GENERAL CHURCH COUNCIL

This lesson is one of the most important in the whole historical part of the New Testament. It is the record of the first general council of the church, called to settle the fundamental question as to how a man may be just with God. We have become acquainted with "they of the circumcision" who, at chapter 2, objected to Peter's fellowship with the Gentiles in the case of Cornelius. The party was strong and growing stronger. As Jews of the stricter sort they could not understand how Gentiles could become Christians without in a sense first becoming Jews. Their theory is expressed in verse 1. Some of them, who have come to by styled "Judaizing teachers," had followed Paul and Barnabas to Antioch and sought to undermine their work there. The immediate result is given in verses 3-4. The second of these two verses should be read in connection with Paul's account of this gathering in Galatians 2. The appearance of Peter (vv. 7-11) is his last in this book, and it is remarkable that as an apostle of the circumcision so-called (Galatians 2:8), he should have been used by the Holy Spirit to reprove the error of the Judaizing teachers. He does so by a plain relation of facts, an interrogative argument and a statement of belief. The preciousness of that statement is enhanced by a recurrence to the later dark ages of the church when its momentous truth was obscured by the sacramentalism of the papacy.

But the settlement of this great doctrine is not the only feature marking the value of this Council, since we have in the inspired words of James

following (vv. 13-18), the Divine program for the whole of this age and the following. Here we have the great truth of the dispensations so necessary to the understanding of the Bible, and so little appreciated by many Christian teachers today. How different would be the work of our large denominational gatherings if the facts here alluded to were taken into consideration? Here is the order of events: First, God is now in this Christian age visiting the Gentiles "to take out of them a people for His Name." This, in other words, is a time of outgathering of an elect number from the nations to form the church or the body of Christ (see ~~4006~~Ephesians 3:6 in the light of its context). Secondly, "After this" Christ "will return" (v. 16). The feature of the return of Christ here spoken of is not that for the translation of the church which is his body (~~5046~~1 Thessalonians 4:16-18), but His visible return in power and glory of which the Old Testament prophets speak. This is that second feature of His second coming to which reference has been made before in these pages. It follows the rapture of the church synchronizing with the threatened judgments on the living Gentile nations and the deliverance of Israel from her great tribulation. Thirdly, following this event will transpire the building again of "the tabernacle of David" (v. 16), in other words the restoration of the kingdom to Israel (compare ~~4013~~Luke 1:32-33). Finally, during the Millennial Age "the residue of men" will "seek after the Lord" (see ~~2012~~Isaiah 2:2, 11:10, 60:5).

The divine program enunciated by James is followed by his "sentence" (v. 19), which is, in effect, the judgment of the whole assembly now reduced to writing, and to be transmitted to the churches by a committee of the brethren named in verse 22. All that the Gentiles are asked to abstain from are those things more or less associated with idolatry (v. 20), and which were not distinguished as Mosaic prohibitions, but based on the earlier covenant of Noah (~~4000~~Genesis 9:4), binding equally on Gentile and Jew. Nevertheless, verse 21, indicates that in the abstinence therefrom they were to show a suitable respect for their Jewish neighbors who were instructed in these things in the Old Testament scriptures, of which the Gentiles until that time were ignorant.

## QUESTIONS

1. With what event does this lesson deal?
2. What question, or doctrine, was now settled?

3. What was the contention of the Judaizing teachers?
4. In what epistle does Paul refer to their false teaching?
5. What is the nature of Peter's address on this occasion?
6. What other feature gives an outstanding character to this chapter?
7. What is the divine order of the ages as indicated here?
8. What was the final sentence of this Council?

## ACTS 15:36-17:22 — SECOND JOURNEY

Though the text of this lesson is long, it will be interesting to read it through at a single sitting, and get the whole journey at one view. The events are clear cut, easily remembered and apparent in their spiritual teaching.

### STARTING FORTH

It begins with the contention between Paul and Barnabas — men "of like passions" with ourselves, which was providentially overruled so that two missionary journeys grew out of it instead of one (15:36-41). Note that there were churches in Syria and Cilicia though no account is given of their origin beyond that of Antioch. It is a hint of the activity of the preachers of the Gospel, and the extent to which the gospel may have spread in that early time far beyond the record.

The story of the second visit to Lystra (16:1-3), gains interest from the subsequent prominence of Timothy, of whom further data are found in the epistles Paul afterward addressed to him. His circumcision is no evidence of inconsistency on Paul's part, since no question of principle was involved, but only expediency (v. 3). As Timothy's father was a Greek, it would be known that he was uncircumcised which would prevent this ministry among the Jews (compare here ~~1~~ 1 Corinthians 9:20).

The outstanding feature of this journey is in verses 6-10 of this chapter. "Asia" (v. 6) was a name given to a large part of the coast of Asia Minor especially on the southeast. Why the Holy Spirit forbade the missionaries to preach there at this time, or the manner in which the prohibition was communicated, is not stated; but we know that later a great work was wrought there especially in Ephesus. The story is repeated with reference

to the North (Bithynia), and as the only point of the compass left is the West, they make for the seaport of Troas. The student is urged to identify these localities on the map. At Troas special direction is required, for the sea is to be crossed, and God meets the need in the vision vouchsafed to Paul. At this point interest is added by the pronoun "we" in verse 10, indicating that the author, Luke, has now joined the party.

### **EXPERIENCES IN PHILIPPI**

Their stay at Philippi is full of movement (vv. 12-40). It was an important city found by Philip of Macedon, inhabited chiefly by Roman citizens, but lacking in a Jewish population as is shown in the fact that it contained no synagogue (v. 13). It is unusual to read of a woman (Lydia) as engaged in commercial pursuits on her own account in that early time, but she seems to have been an exporter of Thyatira, noted for its purple dyes (vv. 14-15).

The case following is that of demon possession, with phenomena not very different from modern clairvoyance or the spiritualistic seance (vv. 16-18). Of course the resultant proceedings were all illegal (vv. 19-24), but how greatly was God glorified thereby (vv. 25-34)! Verses 35-38 illustrate that a Christian may with dignity insist upon his legal rights. Immunity from corporal punishment was one of the most valued privileges of Roman citizenship, and to impose it was a crime in the eye of the law. No wonder the magistrates were afraid. But learn the lesson of these verses concerning the way of Satan with the gospel. He first applauds and seems to help it along by flattery and with advertisement (v. 17), but when his testimony is rejected, he shows his true character (v. 19). Paul's preaching aimed at the idol worship of Rome which gave the excuse of verses 20-21. Let us also be impressed with the simplicity of the gospel in verse 31. To believe on the Lord Jesus Christ is simply to commit one's self to Him to be saved. Nothing else is to be done, for God has put away our guilt in His atonement, and offers reconciliation for our acceptance. Note the reference to the jailer's "house." No one can be saved except by the exercise of a personal faith in the Savior, but there is great encouragement here for the Christian parent to bring his offspring to the Lord in full assurance.

### **THESSALONICA TO ATHENS**

Thessalonica now claims our attention (17:1-9), a most influential city then and now, located on the Aegean Sea, and on the direct route to Rome.

Paul's method with the Jews is further presented here in verses 2-3. He employed the Old Testament scriptures. He reasoned with them, doubtless in the form of questions and answers. They were expecting the Messiah, the Christ, and he showed them that when He came it was necessary according to their own scriptures that he should suffer, die and rise again from the dead. Establishing these points he was then ready to show that "this Jesus Whom I preach unto you is the Christ," because He has fulfilled these things. The customary results follow, faith in some, envy and opposition in others, persecution, and removal to another place. The experience is repeated in Berea (vv. 10-14), and then we find Paul at Athens (vv. 16-34), still at this time "the intellectual and artistic capital of the world." It was also a religious capital, the strongest in Greek mythology, as illustrated in the text. The "Areopagus" (v. 19) was a court somewhat like the roman Senate; and here Paul addressed the philosophers and leading citizens in terms familiar to them. Their "unknown God" he introduces to them as the Creator of all things and the "Lord of heaven and earth," and the future judge of men through His Son Jesus Christ, Whom He hath "raised from the death" (vv. 23-31). The poets he quotes (v. 28) were Cleanthus and Aratus, whom he tactfully employs against their countrymen, whose boasted philosophy was "ignorance" (v. 30). The times of this ignorance God had "winked at" thus far, in other words, overlooked. Not in the sense that they would not be held to account or judged for it, but that He had sent them no special revelation of Himself until now. There is no distinctive application of the gospel here, and possibly because Paul's hearers were not prepared for it, but still his testimony was not in vain (v. 34).

### **CORINTH AND EPHESUS**

Corinth was the capital of Achaia, the lower peninsula of Greece; and in comparison with Athens, a great commercial center, cosmopolitan in its population, and as immoral as could well be conceived. The record of Paul's experiences here is varied by several details, for example his association with Aquila and Priscilla; the reference to his trade, for all Jewish lads, no matter what their circumstances, were taught trades; the encouraging vision he received; the length of time he remained in the city; the turning of the tables on his enemies; the Jewish vow he assumed, etc. (18:1-18). To speak of the vision, judging by verse 5, and also by certain allusions in Paul's two epistles to this church, there was special need of it at

this time. He seems to have been much depressed, and the Lord graciously desired him to be without anxiety. This explains why he remained there so long. The event before Gallio brings to mind one of the incidental evidences of the historical accuracy of this narrative. He is called the "deputy" of Achaia, and as a matter of fact that is what he was only, and not a proconsul, for at this time Achaia was united to Macedonia. Somewhat later it was constituted a province on its own account, and then came to have its own proconsul. The vow which Paul took may have been one of those concessions to the Jews he thought needful for expediency's sake.

Ephesus next reached (vv. 19-21). Was just across the Aegean Sea from Corinth, and was the capital of the Roman province of Asia, noted for its commerce, but particularly for its temple of Diane (Artemis). There was a large Jewish population there, and they were accorded special privileges by the local government. We shall learn more of Paul's work there in our next lesson.

## QUESTIONS

1. What hint does this lesson give of the development of Christianity at this time?
2. Have you read ~~1~~ 1 Corinthians 9:20?
3. Have you traced this journey on the map?
4. Name the four missionaries in the journey.
5. How were the rights of Paul and Silas infringed upon in Philippi?
6. What is it to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ?
7. What encouragement for Christian parents is found here?
8. What is the meaning of 17:30?
9. Tell the story of Paul's stay in Corinth in your own words.
10. What was the geographical relation of Corinth and Ephesus?

## ACTS 18:23-21:17 — THIRD JOURNEY

As in the last lesson, it is recommended that the text of the present one be read through at a single sitting, and two or three times if possible, before considering the comments, which then will be more valuable.

Some time had been spent again in Antioch, after which the whole territory of Phrygia and Galatia, in Asia minor, was once more traversed for the purpose indicated in 18:23. Ephesus was duly reached (19:1), where Paul found a condition of things explained by the closing verses of chapter 18. Apollos does not seem to have been a Christian till Aquila and Priscilla met him, but he had been awakened by the ministry of John the Baptist, and was learned in the Old Testament Scriptures. The "disciples" Paul met (19:2), were possibly those of Apollos' ministry, whom he (Paul) brought out into the full fellowship of the gospel (vv. 2-7). "Since ye believed" of verse 2, should be rendered "when ye believed." There was something lacking in these disciples which Paul observed, and which led him to put this question, because the reception of the Holy Spirit is the test of true discipleship (~~cf~~ Romans 8:9). (See comment on 2:5-13.)

Verses 8-20 show an unusual work of grace in and around Ephesus at this time. "The school of Tyrannus" (v. 9) was the convenient meeting place. The special miracles by Paul (v. 11) were an offset to the unusual power of the evil one there. This power showed itself in the "vagabond Jews" of verse 13 who suffered justly for their wickedness (v. 16), and whose defeat wrought gloriously for the Gospel (v. 17). There was much of this occultism in Ephesus, the overthrow of which is portrayed in the bonfire of the books of the black art, the cost of which was about \$10,000.

But the spread of the Gospel was exhibited in the undermining of the controlling trade of the city, with the consequences following (vv. 23-41).

Chapter 20 is a diary of an extended journey from Ephesus to Macedonia (vv. 1-2), when again Paul must have visited Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, etc. Then he came down into Greece, possibly Athens, certainly Corinth saw his labors again. Here his purpose to cross by sea to Syria was interfered with by plots against his life, so that he retraced his steps into Macedonia, and crossed again to Troas (vv. 3-6). A week in Troas was made memorable by his discourse till midnight, and the miraculous recovery of the young man Eutychus (vv. 7-21). Note that this gathering of the saints to "break bread," i.e., observe the Lord's supper, was on the first day of the week, strengthening the conviction that the Lord's day had taken the place of the Jewish Sabbath as the time for Christian assemblies. Twenty miles on foot, and apparently alone, brought Paul to Assos, and thence by ship to Mitylene, and finally Miletus (vv. 13-16).



A tender episode meets us here in his farewell discourse to the beloved elders (bishops or presbyters) of the church at Ephesus (vv. 17-38). Three of his discourses have been reported hitherto somewhat at length, but this is especially interesting as the first spoken to the church. The others were missionary discourses. He first testifies to his own integrity as a minister (vv. 18-21); he then alludes to the bonds and afflictions that await him (vv. 22-27); a charge to the elders follows (vv. 28-31); a further testimony to his faithfulness (vv. 32-35); the prayer of farewell (vv. 36-38). Space will not permit elaboration, but verse 28 should not be passed over in its clear testimony to the oneness of God in Christ. "The church of God which he purchased with His own Blood." The Deity of our Lord is here asserted, and the priceless cost of our redemption. There is no suggestion of an "apostolic succession" in verse 29, but just the opposite; a prophecy by-the-way, finding fulfillment in all the centuries, and never more positively than now. The beatitude of verse 37 was evidently current in the early church in addition to those recorded in the gospels, and this reference to it gives it inspired authority.

The journey continues until Jerusalem is reached (21:1-17), the most important features of which are the warnings of the apostle not to go to Jerusalem at all (4:10-14). The second says that these warnings were not merely from man but from the Holy Spirit. How then can we explain his neglect of them? Shall we say that they were not in the nature of a command, but a testing? Verses 11-13 suggest this. There is one other difficulty in this chapter, where the prophesying of women is referred to (v. 9), and which seems to contradict Paul later on in 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2. We cannot explain it, except to suggest that possibly this prophesying was private rather than in the public assembly.

## QUESTIONS

1. Have you read the text of this lesson as requested?
2. Why did Paul take this journey through Asia Minor?
3. What is suggested in this lesson as the test of true discipleship?
4. State in your own words the story of Paul's ministry in Ephesus at this time.
5. What makes memorable his stay at Troas on this journey?
6. Analyze his discourse to the elders of Ephesus.

7. What two great doctrinal truths are emphasized in 20:28?
8. Quote the new beatitude of verse 37.
9. What do verses 11-13 suggest concerning Paul's warnings?

## ACTS 21:18-23:35 —TUMULT IN JERUSALEM

The stirring events in this lesson are:

1. Paul's Ceremonial Vow (21:18-26)
2. His Apprehension by the Jewish Mob (vv. 27-30)
3. His Speech to Them from the Castle Stairs (v. 31-22:21)
4. His Colloquy with the Roman soldiers (vv. 22-29)
5. His Defense before the Sanhedrin (v. 30-23:11)
6. The Plot to Murder Him (vv. 12-22)
7. The Escape to Caesarea (vv. 23-35).

As to Paul's vow, it is to be kept in mind that the Judaizing element in the church increased as its numbers increased, and while they had accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, yet they were also zealous for the law of Moses. They can be sympathized with in this, considering their past history as Jews; but not when they attached a saving value to the law, or attempted to force its observance upon the Gentiles. To propitiate them and promote peace, Paul was tempted to compromise in the matter of this vow whatever it may have been, and he fell into a snare. It might be said in extenuation that the pressure was exceedingly strong upon him.

Of course it was not these Judaizing Christians who set upon him in the temple, but out and out Jews who hated Christianity altogether, and to whom the opportunity had been given by the action of Paul in yielding to the prejudices of the others.

This speech on the castle stairs constitutes: first, an account of himself as a Jew (vv. 1-5); second, the story of his conversion (vv. 6-16); and third a declaration of his divine commission (vv. 17-21). In the story of his conversion some have found a difficulty in that Paul says his companions saw the light but heard no voice, while in chapter 9, Luke reports that they heard the voice. The explanation probably is that they heard the sound of the voice but were unable to understand the words. What he says of his

divine commission here is not given in chapter 9, and is especially interesting and important on that account. It is a chapter of his inner life which otherwise never would have been known.

In Paul's defense before the Sanhedrin some think he was acting in the flesh, and after his own will rather than in the Holy Spirit. This is a serious charge to make and great caution is necessary, but the circumstances supposed to justify it are the abruptness of his beginning without waiting to be questioned, and his apparently self-righteous spirit (23:1), his offensive epithet to the high priest (v. 3), and his cleverness in dividing the council (v. 6). If there be anything in such a supposition, we are all the happier for the evidence in verse 11, that it was all right once more between the Lord and himself before the next day arose.

We need not continue our comments further in this case.

### QUESTIONS

1. Give the outline of this lesson.
2. How would you explain the occasion for Paul's vow?
3. Do you see the distinction between Jews, and those here called Judaizers?
4. Analyze Paul's speech on the castle stairs.
5. What serious reflection is sometimes cast upon Paul at this crisis, and on what grounds?
6. What Divine comfort or justification of Paul does the record contain?

## ACTS 24-26 — PAUL A PRISONER AT CAESAREA

There are three dignitaries of the Roman Empire before whom Paul now has a hearing — Felix, Festus and Agrippa.

The circumstances in the first instance show the great importance the Jewish leaders attached to the matter, since the high priest himself journeyed to Caesarea as an accuser of Paul, bringing with him not only a number of the elders but a Roman lawyer (34:1). The latter's indictment of Paul contains three counts, that of a political plotter, a religious heretic, and a violator of the temple (vv. 5-6). Paul denies the first, admits the

second, and challenges evidence of the third (vv. 12-20). "More perfect knowledge of that way" (v. 22), means that Felix knew much about Christ and Christianity though himself not a follower of the Nazarene.

Drusilla was a sister of Agrippa of whom the next chapter speaks, and a daughter of the Herod who martyred James (chap. 12). She was not a lawful wife of Felix, having deserted her own husband to live with him. Of course the plot to kill Paul when he should return to Jerusalem (25:3), was not known to Festus, which makes it the more remarkable that he decided to keep him in Caesarea, and shows the hand of God in the premises.

Agrippa was king of Chalcis, holding the title by the grace of the Roman Emperor, and Bernice was his sister. The hearing before them was made a great state occasion (v. 23). Paul's opening words are courteous and tactful (26:2-3). He reviews his past life as a Pharisee (vv. 4-11). He recounts once more his heavenly vision, his conversion and commission (vv. 12-18). The last verse is a remarkably condensed statement of the Gospel, referring to

- (1) humanity's condition by nature, blinded, darkened and under the power of Satan;
- (2) the power of divine grace to give liberty and light to him including forgiveness, and an inheritance among the saints; and
- (3) the instrument of it all — faith in Christ. Next, Paul speaks of his unjust treatment at the hands of the Jews, and the protection of God accorded him. The verdict follows in verses 30-32.

## QUESTIONS

1. Name the Roman dignitaries of this lesson.
2. Give the specifications against Paul.
3. What biographical data can you give about Drusilla?
4. How is the hand of God seen in the action of Festus?
5. Give an exegesis of 25:18.
6. What was the verdict of Festus and Agrippa?

## ACTS 27-28 — A PRISONER AT ROME

The reader is urged to add to the interest of this lesson by the further use of the map. The sea journey is marked by different stages, from:

- Adramyttium to Myra (27:1-5),
- Myra to the Fair Havens (27:6-8),
- Fair havens to Melita or Malta (27:6-28:1),
- Melita to Syracuse (28:2-12),
- Syracuse to Rhegium, Puteoli and Rome (28:13-15).

The most interesting stage is the third, which covers the shipwreck. In all classic literature there is nothing which gives so much information of the working of an ancient ship. Moreover, historical research has confirmed the facts of the chapter and identified the scene of the wreck. The narrative has often been used in an allegorical sense to portray the history of the church, and also the history of the salvation of a single soul, but we have no time to enter into this. Frank Gaebelein has a striking observation on Paul's warning to the centurion and the shipmaster (27:9-11), saying:

We can think of other warnings given through the great apostle, warnings concerning the spiritual dangers, the apostasy of the last days, the perilous times of seducing spirits and doctrines of demons. The professing church has forgotten these, for which she is drifting cast about by every wind of doctrine and rapidly nearing the long-predicted shipwreck.

Alas! how true this is!

The phrase "barbarous people" (28:2), is not to be understood as meaning savages, but simply foreigners to the Greeks. All who did not speak their language were called "barbarians." What a striking fulfillment of <sup><4168></sup>Mark 16:18 is found in verses 2-6! Read verses 15-16 in comparison with <sup><4111></sup>Romans 1:11-13, written years before, and be impressed with the different way in which Paul entered Rome from that which he expected. Note in verse 17 how consistent is his method of preaching the Gospel with the principle he laid down in <sup><4116></sup>Romans 1:16, "to the Jew first." Note too, his quotation of <sup><2162></sup>Isaiah 6:25-27, when the Jews turned their back upon his message, and how sadly those words of the prophet have been

fulfilled in the history of their nation from that day to this. But the latter part of Romans 11 should be read in the same connection, to learn what God's gracious purpose is for that same people in the time to come. Verse 28 marks a larger beginning of the world-wide proclamation of the "salvation of God" among the nations. This proclamation however will one day close as Romans 11 foretells, when it will have come to pass that they too have judged themselves "unworthy of eternal life."

Paul is now a prisoner in Rome where he remains for two years actively engaged not only in preaching the gospel by word of mouth, but expounding its deeper truths through the epistles he wrote from his prison house to the churches of Ephesus, Colosse and Philippi. There is reason to believe from his later pastoral epistles that he was liberated after his hearing before the Emperor, and once more took up his itinerary among the churches and in unevangelized parts. He was arrested a second time however, as we may gather from the same sources, when, according to tradition, he was beheaded in Rome for his testimony to the Gospel and the Savior he loved.

### QUESTIONS

1. Name the stages of Paul's sea journey.
2. How is the word "barbarous" explained?
3. Have you read the latter part of Romans 11?
4. What church epistles were written from Rome by Paul?
5. What have history and tradition to say concerning the subsequent life of this great apostle?