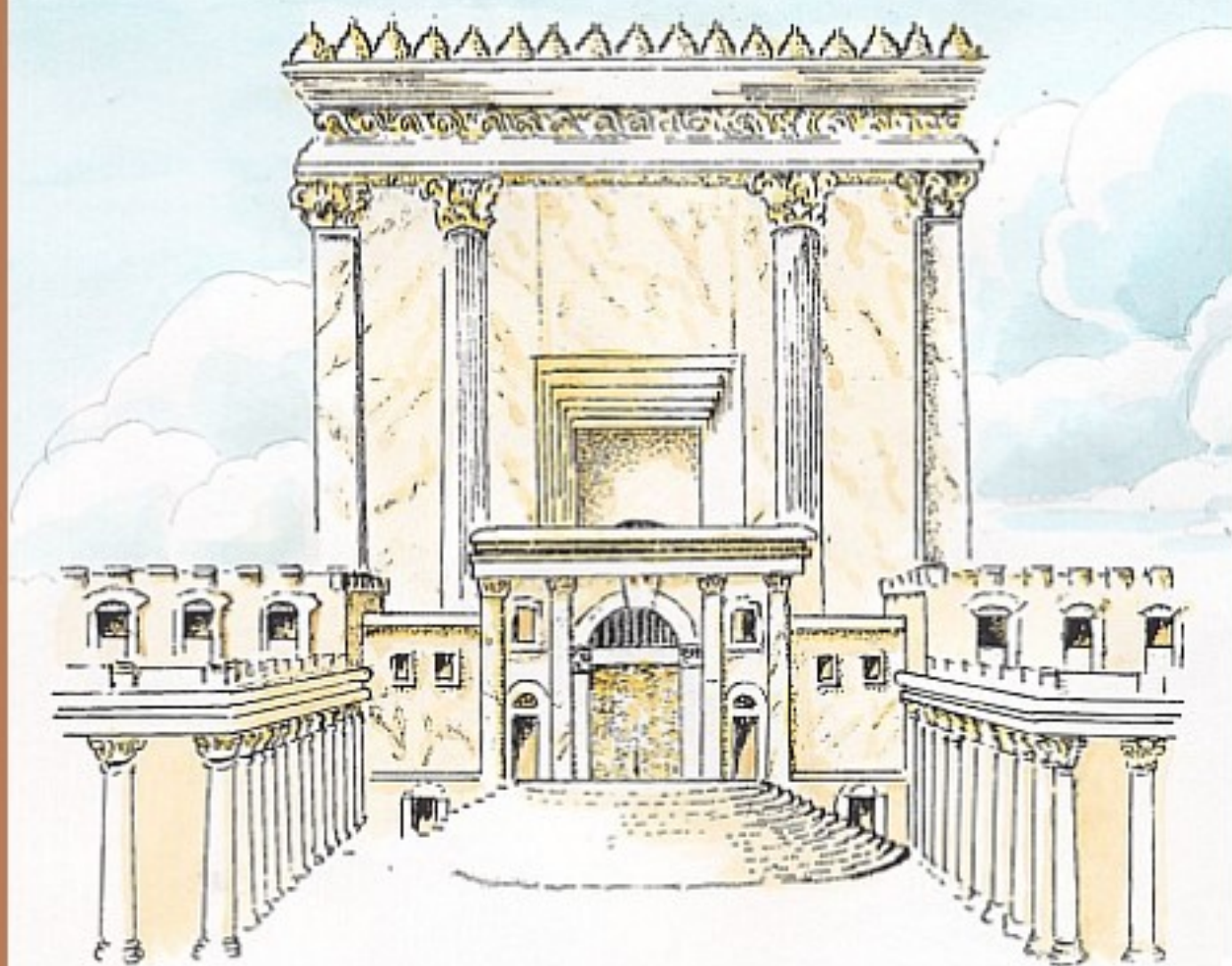


THE NEW TESTAMENT BIBLE STORY

VOLUME 3



THE NEW TESTAMENT BIBLE STORY

VOLUME 3

**THE BOOK OF ACTS AND
THE GENERAL EPISTLES**

Keith Hunt

PREFACE

I would like to give much thanks and appreciation to Roger Waite for the work of reading, correcting spelling, grammar, and the final editing of this manuscript. I would also like to thank Muriel Crawford for her part in the illustrating this New Testament Bible Story.

Especially, of course, I give praise and thanks to the heavenly Father for answering my prayers for help and guidance. As a human being I realize this work may not be without errors. If errors can be proved, may they be found and corrected by those who come after me.

The main desire of this work is to lead people to Jesus as personal Savior, to make the Gospels a very readable story for children and youths as well as adults, and to bring out the fact that Jesus was BOTH human and divine, Immanuel, God in the flesh, and the sinless Savior, the perfect sacrifice to save all who will come to the Eternal God through Him.

Truly it is written: "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him, should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16, KJV)

This work is dedicated to all the children and youths who may read this story, and all the children of God and disciples of Jesus Christ everywhere.

Keith Hunt

FROM THE EDITOR:

A favourite book series amongst young people in the Worldwide Church of God in my teen years was a 6 volume series called “The Bible Story” written and illustrated for children by the late Basil Wolverton. This Bible series for children brought the Bible alive for many children.

The 6 volume series covered the Old Testament except for the prophetic and wisdom books (http://www.herbert-w-armstrong.com/bible_story.html).

A New Testament Bible Story series was began around 1990 but did not get very far before the Good News magazine was cancelled. Following that there was great turmoil as the new leadership of the Worldwide Church of God, following the death of Herbert Armstrong in 1986, rejected those key doctrines that clearly distinguished the church from mainstream Christianity.

This led to a breakup of the church with many new groups forming who still felt convicted that those key doctrines that differentiated the Church of God from mainstream Christianity were the true doctrines taught by the Bible. I was amongst those and currently attend the United Church of God in Brisbane, Australia.

Our author, Keith Hunt, attended an earlier split-off group during the 1970’s before Herbert Armstrong’s death until circumstances led him away from that group and he currently pastors as an independent minister in western Canada.

This New Testament Bible Story has its genesis in my lamenting the fact that the old Bible Story series never got as far as the New Testament. I was discussing this with my late friend, Richard Nickels, who used to publish a newsletter entitled “Giving and Sharing”. As I was backed up with a series of other projects and felt that trying to do it myself would be too time consuming, I ended up placing an ad in Richard’s newsletter calling for a volunteer writer and artist.

I was delighted with Keith Hunt’s capability and eagerness to take on the project and that he has done such a magnificent job with what he has written. He has done a wonderful job following on from Basil Wolverton’s past legacy with this New Testament Bible Story which we hope will make the New Testament come alive for children as well as those young at heart!

I have added editorial notes where I have wanted to further expand on some key points as well as offer an alternate point of view where I occasionally have a differing point of view.

One of the projects that I created at the time that Keith was writing this New Testament Bible Story was a 12 lesson Young Adults Bible Study which covers the major doctrines of the Bible (www.rogerswebsite.com/CD.htm) and is available on my website. It can also be ordered on disc. Keith also has many informative articles available on his own website (www.keithhunt.com) which he makes reference to in many of his comments.

Currently another volunteer, also from Canada, Muriel Crawford, has done a number of the early illustrations. I have filled the rest of this series with other illustrations that

I have searched for on the internet. These illustrations will be phased out over time as Muriel and possibly other volunteers create others which will replace these.

Once we have replaced all the images in this online version with illustrations we have ownership to I have a couple of organisations in mind to approach to fund a hard copy print run of this series and make it more widely available not just within the greater Church of God but also to a much wider audience by offering it at cost price on amazon.com.

I asked Keith to give an overview of each of the New Testament epistles and slot them in chronologically (as when they were written) into the Book of Acts before covering the Book of Revelation. He has covered all the New Testament epistles in much detail.

I have since changed that order to the original order of the New Testament canon which differs from the order of the New Testament in most Bibles. In the original New Testament canon the general epistles of James, Peter, John and Jude follow the Book of Acts and then comes the epistles of Paul starting with those written to whole churches and finishing with the pastoral epistles written to individuals such as Timothy and Titus. Following that, of course, is the Book of Revelation.

The writers of the general epistles had seniority over Paul within the early church and that was one reason for their epistles being included first. The second reason that motivated my change of order with this New Testament Bible Story was that the general epistles cover fundamental themes such as faith (James), hope (Peter), love (John) and truth (Jude) before Paul covers more complex subjects finishing with how ministers are to run the church in his pastoral epistles such as those to Timothy and Titus.

Putting this New Testament Bible Story in that same order with its gradual rise from the simpler to more complex subjects made perfect sense for this series aimed at teaching children the wonderful truths of God's Holy Bible.

Volume 1 covers the story of Jesus ministry in the Gospels up till His last Feast of Tabernacles.

Volume 2 covers Jesus ministry in the Gospels in His last 6 months and after His resurrection.

Volume 3 covers the Book of Acts and the general epistles of James, Peter, John and Jude covering the fundamental themes such as faith (James), hope (Peter), love (John) and truth (Jude).

Volume 4 covers the epistles of Paul written to whole churches.

Volume 5 covers the pastoral epistles of Paul and the Book of Revelation.

We truly hope that this New Testament Bible Story makes the Bible come alive to you and that you enjoy it and learn much about the wonderful truths of the Bible through it!

Roger Waite

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The Book of Acts:

CHAPTER 1 - Jesus Ascends To Heaven	6
CHAPTER 2 - Power on Pentecost Day!	14
CHAPTER 3 - Peter's Second Sermon	21
CHAPTER 4 - Deception, Persecution And Imprisonment	26
CHAPTER 5 - New Deacons and the Death of Stephen	32
CHAPTER 6 - Evangelism Spreads	38
CHAPTER 7 - The Conversion Of Saul	45
CHAPTER 8 - The Gospel Goes To The Gentiles	52
CHAPTER 9 - Peter's Miraculous Deliverance and Paul's First Missionary Journey	60
CHAPTER 10 - The Circumcision Question Settled	69
CHAPTER 11 - Paul's Second Missionary Journey	80
CHAPTER 12 - Paul's Third Missionary Journey	93
CHAPTER 13 - Paul Moves On From Ephesus During His Third Missionary Journey	99
CHAPTER 14 - Paul arrives in Jerusalem	104
CHAPTER 15 - Paul's Defence from the Jews' Accusations	110
CHAPTER 16 - Paul Answers the Jewish Sanhedrin	113
CHAPTER 17 - Paul Travels to Rome	124

The General Epistles:

CHAPTER 18 - The Epistle of James (Part 1)	144
CHAPTER 19 - The Epistle of James (Part 2)	153
CHAPTER 20 - The Epistle of James (Part 3)	159
CHAPTER 21 - The 1st Epistle of Peter (Part 1)	166
CHAPTER 22 - The 1st Epistle of Peter (Part 2)	172
CHAPTER 23 - The 1st Epistle of Peter (Part 3)	178
CHAPTER 24 - The 1st Epistle of Peter (Part 4)	184
CHAPTER 25 - The 2nd Epistle of Peter (Part 1)	190
CHAPTER 26 - The 2nd Epistle of Peter (Part 2)	195
CHAPTER 27 - The 2nd Epistle of Peter (Part 3)	202
CHAPTER 28 - The 1st Epistle of John (Part 1)	208
CHAPTER 29 - The 1st Epistle of John (Part 2)	212
CHAPTER 30 - The 1st Epistle of John (Part 3)	219
CHAPTER 31 - The 1st Epistle of John (Part 4)	224
CHAPTER 32 - The 1st Epistle of John (Part 5)	229
CHAPTER 33 - The 2nd Epistle of John	234
CHAPTER 34 - The 3rd Epistle of John	237
CHAPTER 35 - The Epistle of Jude	242

CHAPTER 1

JESUS ASCENDS TO HEAVEN

The following introduction to the book of Acts is taken from the New KJV Personal Study Bible, published by Thomas Nelson, Inc. 1990, 1995.

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF ACTS

This book, tracing the origins of the Christian church, is sometimes called "The Acts of the Holy Spirit" because of the Spirit's activity throughout. It has also been called "The Gospel of the Spirit." It may, with some justification, be termed "The Acts of Peter and Paul" because of the prominence given to these two leaders. The book is indispensable to our understanding of Christian beginnings. It presents Rome as the guardian of law and order, a situation which often worked to the advantage of Paul and the gospel (16:38; 25:11). The sermons recorded indicate the way the Good News was presented to Jews (2:14-39), to Gentiles (13:5-47), and to a more sophisticated audience (17:16-31). The gospel was first preached to Jews in the synagogue, then to Gentiles (see 13:46; 19:9).

AUTHOR AND DATE

The Book of Acts is the second of a two-volume set, both addressed to Theophilus and written by one of Paul's associates named Luke "the beloved physician" (Col. 4:14). The first volume is the Gospel of Luke. Evidence points to Philippi as Luke's home. Some conjecture that he was the "man of Macedonia" who, in a vision, sought help from Paul (16:9). The author of Acts was a companion of Paul in many of his journeys, as implied by his use of "we" (e.g., 16:1). He was also with Paul during his imprisonment in Rome (see 2 Tim. 4:11), the date is less easily determined. The author probably concluded his account two years after Paul's imprisonment in Rome, about A.D.63 (28:3).

BACKGROUND

Luke's Gospel closed with emphasis on the ascension of the risen Christ (21:50-53): Acts opens with special attention to this important event in Christian history (1:1-11). The eleven apostles, and many other believers, were joyous after witnessing the Ascension. Yet they were at a loss to know what to do next, other than selecting a successor to Judas. All this mingling of hope and uncertainty vanished at Pentecost.

Henceforth, with courage and power, they gave witness to their conviction that Jesus was alive. Their claim was confirmed by undeniable miracles performed in His name (4:14). The witness of these Christians brought consternation to persons responsible for Jesus' death. Those who killed Him thought they had disposed of Him. Now His authority and power were stirring Jerusalem more than ever. There was intense opposition led by Saul of Tarsus and the rulers in Jerusalem. Yet the gospel spread rapidly to Judea, Samaria, and the entire Mediterranean world.

CONTENTS

The entire Book of Acts is an expansion and fulfillment of the promise in 1:8 - "you shall be witnesses ... in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Following the Ascension in rapid succession are Pentecost and the birth of the church, as distinct from a mere Jewish sect. Thousands of Jews became believers. The Good News was taken to the Samaritans and to the "God-fearers" (see 10:2; 11:19, 20) in Caesarea and Antioch. Paul's strategy focused on Gentile evangelism (13:46). Then came the decision about circumcision (15:1-29), the planting and nourishing of new communities of believers, Paul's arrest, his trip to Rome, and his ministry while in prison. Throughout the book, as

reflected in the sermons, there is emphasis on the activity of the Holy Spirit and the power of Jesus' resurrection.

PURPOSE

Luke 1:3, 4 offer a clue to the author's purpose: to provide "an orderly account ... that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed." Luke was a researcher and chronicler of events for the benefit of his friend Theophilus and for the general reader. His purpose was to inform and confirm the faith of believers, as well as to win converts to what was first called "the Way" (9:2).

OUTLINE OF ACTS

ONE. The gospel to the Jews: 1:1-9:43

A. Speaking the word with boldness: 1:1-5:42

1. Ascension: Judas replaced: 1:1-26
2. The Spirit's coming: 2:1-47
3. The apostles' witness: 3:1-4:31
4. Gamaliel's warning: 4:32-5:42

B. The deacons: 6:1-8:40

1. Hebrews versus Hellenists: 6:1, 2
2. Seven deacons chosen: 6:3-7
3. Stephen, the first martyr: 6:8-7:60
4. Philip, the evangelist: 8:1-10

C. Saul converted: 9:1-31

D. Aeneas healed: 9:32-35

E. Dorcas raised to life: 9:36-43

TWO. The gospel to God-fearers: 10:1-12:25

A. Cornelius converted: 10:1-48

B. Peter's defense: 11:1-18

C. Antioch evangelized: 11:19-30

D. Peter released from prison: 12:1-25

THREE. The gospel to the Gentiles: 13:1-21:16

A. First missionary journey: 13:1-14:28

1. Departure to Cyprus: 13:1-12
2. Mission in Antioch of Pisidia: 13:13-52
3. In Iconium, Lystra, Derbe: 14:1-28

B. Conference in Jerusalem: 15:1-35

C. Second missionary journey: 15:36-18:22

1. Paul revisits young churches: 15:36-16:8
2. On to Macedonia: 16:9-17:14
3. Ministry in Athens: 17:15-34
4. Church planting in Corinth: 18:1-22

D. Third missionary journey: 18:23-21:16

1. Victory in Ephesus: 18:23-19:22
2. Riot in Ephesus: 19:23-41
3. Journey to Jerusalem: 20:1-21:16

FOUR. The gospel from Jerusalem to Rome: 21:17-28:31

- A. Paul on trial: 21:17-23:32
- B. Defense before Felix: 23:33-24:27
- C. Defense before Festus: 25:1-21
- D. Defense before Agrippa: 25:22-26:32
- E. Voyage to Rome: 27:1-28:16
- F. Paul's prison witness in Rome: 28:17-31

Acts 1

Luke links what he reported in his Gospel (that bears his name) to what he is now going to report.

He writes to a man named Theophilus, which name means "friend of God." He was probably a prominent Gentile believer, who may have indeed assisted Luke in his research (see Luke 1:3, 4). He is addressed as "most excellent" in Luke 1:3. The same Greek title of respect is used for Felix (24:3) and Festus (26:25) where it is translated "most noble." In this introduction, as in the content of both the Gospel and Acts, Luke envisions a wide audience including the entire Gentile world. (Taken from the commentary in the NKJV Personal Study Bible, mentioned above).

Luke tells us that Jesus had showed Himself alive after His passion of death by MANY infallible proofs. He was again with His disciples, but in resurrected glory form. He could appear to them as flesh and bone - they could touch Him. He appeared to the disciples as they gathered together in the evening of the first day of the week after Jesus had risen from the dead (John 20:19). Then again, eight days later, when Thomas (who had for some reason, not explained to us, missed the appearing of Jesus to the disciples eight days before) was there, congregated with the other disciples; Jesus came and stood in the midst of them. John tells us the doors were shut.

This is a clear instructive note to us, informing us that Jesus now had the power to walk through walls....a kind of "beam me up" from Star Trek movies. As Jesus told us in John 4:24, God is "Spirit" - that is He is made not of matter, in His glorified form, but made of "spirit" - He and the angels live in a different dimension from us - a spirit dimension. They are made from spirit atoms shall we say. We are atoms also when we get right down to it. But somehow those atoms become physical as we know physical, then they become cells and so we are physical cells. Those cells keep replenishing themselves as we eat and drink, and we live, until for whatever reason, those cells or part of those vital cells stop living, and we die.

With God, His cells are "spirit" - everlasting, they do not ever die, they are eternal. But because God is the creator of matter as we know it, He can IF He so chooses transform Himself INTO physical matter of flesh and bone (no need for blood to keep Him alive for He is already eternal). He is still eternally alive even when in the physical form. Shall we say He has eternal physical atoms, when in the physical form.

It's somewhat hard for our brains to understand all what I've just stated, but one day, as the apostle Paul said, we shall KNOW just as we are known.

So Jesus appeared to His disciples, and Thomas was there at that time (see John 20:26). Thomas had doubted that Jesus was again alive, as others had told him. So Jesus instructed him to touch Him, to put his finger into the nail holes in His hands and to put his hand into the hole in Jesus' side, where, as we saw in the last chapters of the Gospels, a soldier had thrust a spear into Jesus, that was the final slaying blow that killed the Son of God on the cross.

Thomas did as Jesus instructed and then with a wild emotional cry, shouted out, "O my Lord, and my God" (John 20:21). Yes, we need to note carefully that Jesus is not only LORD, but also GOD!

Now God is God, or the Father God is God, but here we see that Jesus is God also. This may seem a little confusing, but when you understand that the New Testament especially, shows that the Godhead is made up of TWO individual persons, one being the one called "Father" - the one Jesus spoke to and spoke about, during His ministry in the flesh, and the other being is Jesus the Christ, who was raised from the dead to the God level of existence and power, then what many think is a mystery is really no mystery at all.

There are TWO God beings that make the ONE Godhead (remember we read in the Gospels that Jesus said, "I and my Father are ONE") and we know from the very first chapters of Genesis that God can call TWO as ONE....a man and a woman God said, leave their father and mother, they join together in marriage, and become ONE. They remain as TWO individual beings, but become AS ONE. They often have ONE name, we may know them as Mr. and Mrs. Jones or Mr. and Mrs. Smith. Two individuals both having the same name.

So the Father is God and Jesus is God also (see John chapter one). Sometimes in the New Testament the word "God" is used as a proper name for the Father, and sometimes it is used as a name or title for the Godhead, the context of the verses will tell HOW it is being used. Sometimes the context will tell us it is used for Jesus, just as John 20:28 tells us.

Jesus is God, but NOT God the Father, God the Father is God, but NOT Jesus. They are TWO individual separate spirit bodied beings. Two that make ONE Godhead. The New Testament makes this VERY CLEAR, just read it for what it is and says, and simply let it tell you this very basic truth. The Godhead CAN be understood, it is not a mystery.

Jesus did MANY other signs in the presence of His disciples that are not recorded for us, John said in verse 30 of chapter 20 of his Gospel. Enough signs are recorded for us that we may BELIEVE that Jesus was and is the Christ, the Son of God, and believing we might have eternal life through Him (verse 31). Jesus told Thomas that they were BLESSED who would not physically see Jesus but yet BELIEVE (John 20:29).

When Jesus returns in glory, then all the thousands down through the centuries who have believed but have never seen in person the Christ, WILL SEE Him, and one day we shall SEE the FATHER as promised in Revelation 22:1-5.

John records more about Jesus appearing to His disciples in John chapter 21. You may like to read this section again before continuing in Acts. Jesus gave instruction

that His disciples should not depart from Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Holy Spirit to be poured out on them with power (Acts 1:4-5). He told them they would not have to wait very long.

Is The Kingdom To Come?

Acts 1:6 reads as if it was only on one occasion that the disciples asked Jesus if it was at this time that the Kingdom would be restored to Israel? But the Greek tense used means it was a question asked more than once at different times (we can think of the continuous present Greek tense as not one continuous line but as a broken length of line, stretching over a period of time). The disciples knew the basics of many Old Testament prophecies that foretold of God's Kingdom on earth and Israel as a leading nation under the Messiah, to finally set the right example of living for all other nations of the earth. They often wanted to know from Jesus, if those prophecies would be fulfilled in their life time, during that time in which they were living. Obviously Jesus had never told them that all would come to pass in their life time, so they asked one more time this question, before He was taken up into heaven.

Jesus finally told them that it was NOT for THEM to know the seasons and times of those prophecies, which God had determined to bring to fruition. They were to receive the Holy Spirit with POWER and to be witnesses for Jesus, in the area of Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and even unto the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 1:6-8)

This does NOT mean that SOME in the last days will not know the times and the seasons of God's prophecies. Some things were just not to be understood by some of God's children in their day. Daniel was told that some of the things he wrote about, under inspiration of God's Spirit, and from direct contact with angels sent to him, were sealed and closed up UNTIL the time of the end, and at the time of the end some would understand (see Daniel 12:4, 8-10). The book of Revelation had not yet been written when Jesus was about to ascend to heaven in front of His disciples, and that book contains many end time prophecies, that do tell us about the times and the seasons of God's restoration of all things and the Kingdom of God to come on earth.

It was not for Jesus' disciples of 30 A.D. (the year Jesus died and ascended to heaven) to understand those prophecies.

Jesus Ascends To Heaven And Will Come Again In Like Manner

At the time Jesus spoke those words and answered their often asked question, while they were watching Him, He began to rise up from the earth. They stood there in dumb silent amazement, as Jesus moved up higher and higher from them. Then a cloud came and He was engulfed in its fine white midst, and lifting up with Him, He was soon out of their sight. They were transfixed with wonderment, some with mouths open, some with a puzzled look on their faces, all were astonished and wondering what the whole scene could possibly mean. Was Jesus working another miracle to prove again that He was the very resurrected Son of God? Would He all of a sudden just appear in their midst and walk away with them?

As they were questioning what was happening, two angels, or as Luke puts it, two men in white apparel, stood by them, and then gave them the answer to their questioning minds.

"Ye men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner, as you have seen Him go into heaven."



The Angels tell the Apostles that Jesus Would Return in Like Manner

The disciples now knew that Jesus was gone from them and from earth. They knew He would not be back that day or the next day. They knew He was gone until He should come again with clouds in the glory of God, to establish the Kingdom and to restore Israel. They did not know WHEN that would be....would it be in their life time? They probably thought it would be, but they did not know for sure. They knew Jesus wanted them to remain in Jerusalem until empowered by the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:9-11).

The Disciples Stay In Jerusalem

After Jesus had ascended into heaven from the mount called Olivet which was about a Sabbath day's journey from Jerusalem, they returned back into that city (Acts 1:12).

A Sabbath day's journey was about two-thirds of a mile, according to old Jewish history. You can read the entire Old Testament and you will never find "a Sabbath day's journey" mentioned. It is not in the books of Moses (the first five books of the Old Testament). It was never a law of the Lord, and should never be thought of as a law coming from God. It was one of the hundreds of Jewish laws and rules that was invented by the Pharisees, to try and hedge around the Sabbath, so people in their religious view would be observing the weekly Sabbath day "holy" and "righteously." But as Mark 7 shows us, Jesus saw through all these man-made commandments passed off as God's righteousness. He threw them aside and told the Pharisees they

taught traditions that often nullified the true righteousness and true commandments of God.

This verse is a lesson in Bible reading. Here Luke just reports a fact based on human customs of the day ... that the mount of Olivet was about the distance from Jerusalem that a "tradition" of the religious Pharisees deemed was "a Sabbath day's journey" or the distance that the Pharisees taught was the furthest a person should walk on the Sabbath day. Luke does not enter it as a "law of God" - he simply uses a tradition of the time to tell his readers the distance Olivet was from Jerusalem. We need to be careful when reading the Bible, and realize that sometimes things are said with no bearing as to making it a law of God, or as trying to make it true sin or true righteousness.

The disciples came again to Jerusalem. They went into an upper room, where we are told abode Peter, James, John, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James, the son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas the brother of James.

We are told those mentioned "continued with one accord in PRAYER and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers" (Acts 1:13-14).

Who "the women" were Luke knows his readers knew, it was common knowledge in Luke's day of writing the book of acts. We today can only speculate. Mary the mother of Jesus was there as well as Jesus' physical half-brothers (we saw in the Gospels that Mary and Joseph did have physical children between themselves after Jesus had been born).

By the day of Jesus' ascension into heaven His half-brothers had come to realize who HE really was - the Messiah - God in the flesh, now made God in glory and power by a resurrection from the dead.

We notice here that all these people were together in an upper room and continued in "prayer and supplication." This was not a "bible study" with an opening and closing prayer. It was what today is known as "a prayer meeting." Did they all take turns in praying aloud? Did they all just pray quietly within themselves? We are not told the details, but it was a time of prayer. I guess so when you consider the events of the entire 40 day period Jesus had been with them, and the death and resurrection just before those forty days. It was a very special time, and prayer was indeed most fitting.

Judas Iscariot Needed To Be Replaced

Peter at this time, while there was about 120 disciples present, told them that Judas Iscariot's ministry needed to be replaced with another man. You may recall that in the Gospels Jesus had promised that each of the 12 disciples would in the Kingdom of God on earth, rule over a tribe of Israel, each ruling one tribe. So indeed another man needed to replace Judas Iscariot, who had hanged himself after realizing what it all led to when he took the Pharisees and Temple guards to Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, on the Passover night of the 14th of the first month (called Nisan in the Jewish calendar).

Peter knew also that it was prophesied in the Old Testament that another should replace Judas Iscariot. For he told them that it was written in the Psalms, "Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein" and "his office let another take" (Ps. 69:25; Ps.109:8).

Judas had betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver, then full of remorse had thrown the silver back at the Scribes and Pharisees. They then decided to buy a field with it to bury strangers in, as it was "blood money" and in their self-righteous attitude they were not about to put it into the temple treasury. All this can be seen by reading Matthew 27, starting in verse 5. Also the death of Judas is described in somewhat of a vivid manner. The field that was bought with the 30 pieces of silver became known as the "field of blood" (Acts 1:15-20).

Peter said to the 120 or so disciples present at this time, "Of the men who have been with us through Jesus' ministry, starting from the baptism of John unto the day He was taken up into heaven, which one will you choose and appoint to be with us twelve for a witness of Jesus' resurrection?" (Acts 1:21-22).

It was needful that a man was chosen who had seen and been with Jesus, as a basic constant disciple for the whole of Jesus' earthy ministry. We saw as we went through the Gospels the fact that there were a number of other persons - both men and women - who were part of Jesus' overall constant following, besides the inner core group of THE twelve disciples.

The group of 120 disciples chose two men, one called Joseph Barsabas, and surnamed Justus, and another called Matthias. We are not told how this choosing was done, so the method is not important, and would so allow for a variety of ways to so determine who would be the final two men.

We are told that when it came to deciding THE one of the two who would replace Judas Iscariot, it was by some type of "lots" they gave forth. Again what these "lots" were in specifics we are not told, which once more leaves it open for different ways it could have been done. You will notice PRAYER was employed. The "lot" fell to Matthias who then became one of the very 12 disciples, replacing Judas Iscariot.

Should ALL decisions a "church" congregation (and this is what we have here as put in modern language) is to make, be done with a type of "lot"? No, not really. What we have here in this account is a VERY SERIOUS and a very IMPORTANT disciple office to fill. This is a once in a life time decision for a group of God's children to decide upon. Hence only God could make the FINAL decision and the choosing of a man to be part of the 12 disciples who would one day, rule over a tribe of Israel in the Kingdom of God, when Jesus returns to rule the earth for a thousand years (the time commonly called "the millennium") as foretold in Revelation 20.

Most "church decisions" will not be like this "once in a life time" situation. If it ever is, then yes, it would be proper that God must give the answer, through much prayer and some type of "lot" as given in this example of deciding which man would replace Judas Iscariot. Matthias was now numbered with the eleven apostles (Acts 1:24-26).

CHAPTER 2

POWER ON PENTECOST DAY!

Acts 2

The time period from Passover to the day of Pentecost was commonly called in the first century in Palestine, "first fruits season" or "Pentecost season." The word Pentecost means "count fifty" and from the wave sheaf day during the feast of Unleavened Bread (which is a first day of the week) the Israelites were to count fifty days, and the 50th day was the day or feast day of Pentecost. During that time period the first harvest in Palestine was gathered in, the crop being first barley then wheat. The period of fifty days was the Pentecost season, hence Luke was getting very specific when in verse one of chapter two of the book of Acts he said, "And when the day of Pentecost was FULLY come..." Luke was wanting to make sure all readers knew that he was now relating the events that took place on the VERY feast day of Pentecost. The disciples he says were all together in one place (Acts 2:1).

SUDDENLY, from heaven a sound like a massive whirlwind, was all around the house where the disciples were gathered. Then from what appeared to be from out of nowhere, cloven tongues like made of fire came and sat upon the heads of each of the disciples, and they were miraculously filled with the Holy Spirit in their minds. And they found they could speak in different languages, that they had never learned, as the Holy Spirit led them to so speak (Acts 2:2-3).



The Coming of the Holy Spirit as Tongues of Fire

We shall see presently WHY God gave the disciples this miracle of being able to speak in languages never spoken by them before.

There were at Jerusalem, devout religious people from all the various nations of the then hub of the world, under the great and far flung Roman Empire. It was soon reported to those in Jerusalem what had happened to the group of Jesus' disciples, and as we say, "they came running" to see it all for themselves. They were indeed amazed and dumbfounded at what they heard, for they heard the disciples speaking in their own particular language. This was more than just a miracle of "speaking" it was also a miracle of "hearing" for Luke says it this way: "Every man heard THEM speak in his own language."

This strongly implies that the listener heard ALL of the disciples speaking in his language. So it was like a Chinese man hearing ALL of the disciples speaking Chinese, and the Russian person heard ALL of the disciples speaking in the Russian language, while the Englishman heard them ALL speaking English. A miracle of the hearing as well as of the speaking.

Nothing like this has ever happened before or since. Those who claim to be "Pentecostal churches" and want to try and duplicate this miracle of Pentecost recorded here in Acts 2, have never come close to claiming all the people hear others speaking in just their particular language. This miracle of this Pentecost has remained unique.

Those listening were indeed amazed because they knew the disciples were from Galilee, and so looked upon as basically unlearned people, just "country folks" - not noble well educated "city dwellers." Again they said among themselves, "How can this be? How can every one of us hear them speaking in the language wherein we were born?"

Those people listening were Parthians, Medes, Elamites, dwellers in Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, and Asia (today what is known as Turkey), from Phrygia, Pamphylia, from Egypt, from parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes (Gentiles converted to Judaism). They were from Crete and Arabia, and all of them said they heard THEM speak in their language, the wonderful works of God.¹

Again Luke says they were all amazed and were in doubt as to what this miracle meant. Some others standing by and not given the miracle of hearing, just mocked and laughed at it all, to them it was like a bunch of men who had had too much to drink and were intoxicated with new wine (Acts 2:5-13).

¹ **EDITOR'S NOTE:** The miracle of the tongues of fire and the disciples being heard by different people in their own different languages is assumed by mainstream churches to have been in an upper room but "the house" they were in at the time was most likely the House of God – the Temple of God as pilgrims from across the world witnessed the event. It occurred at the third hour or around 9am when morning prayers were held in the Temple.

Peter's Speaks With Mighty Inspiration

But Peter standing up in front of them all spoke out boldly and powerfully:

"You people of Judea, and all you that dwell in Jerusalem, listen to me, I want you to know this. These disciples are not drunken as some of you suppose, for it is just the third hour of the day (that would be about 9 a.m. as we reckon the day hours).

What you witness it what was prophesied long ago by the prophet Joel, who said and wrote: 'And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh: your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. And on my servants and on my handmaids I will pour out in those days my Spirit; and they shall prophesy: and I will show wonders in heaven above; and signs in the earth below; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and notable day of the Lord come: And it shall come to pass that whoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved' " (Acts 2:14-21).

Now this is an interesting passage, for it teaches us that some of God's prophetic words can have a DOUBLE meaning and a double fulfillment. The words we have just read, taken from the book of Joel (chapter two) in the Old Testament, are such that the details certainly did NOT happen as written on that day of Pentecost that look is recording for us. And furthermore the prophecy of Joel is to take place before the great prophetic "day of the Lord" that is spoken about in 30 or more passages in the Old Testament. And is also spoken about in Revelation chapter 6:12-17. The details of Joel will one day come to pass, a year or so before the coming of Jesus in glory, just before the "day of God's wrath" comes on this earth.

But Peter certainly had no problem in equating the prophecy of Joel with the events of this Pentecost day. It was to him a type of fulfillment, a forerunner of the final mighty and even greater fulfillment, that is still yet to come on this earth and on the people of God that He will choose to again mightily pour out His spirit on, as a witness of the power of God, to the ungodly people of the earth. It will be a witness to tell the people of the nations of the world that the Almighty is now going to step in and shake and roll the earth and its people, in a way that will really start to get their attention.

The people of Jerusalem on this day of Pentecost were attentive for sure, as this witness of the power of God was manifested in their midst.

Peter went on to say:

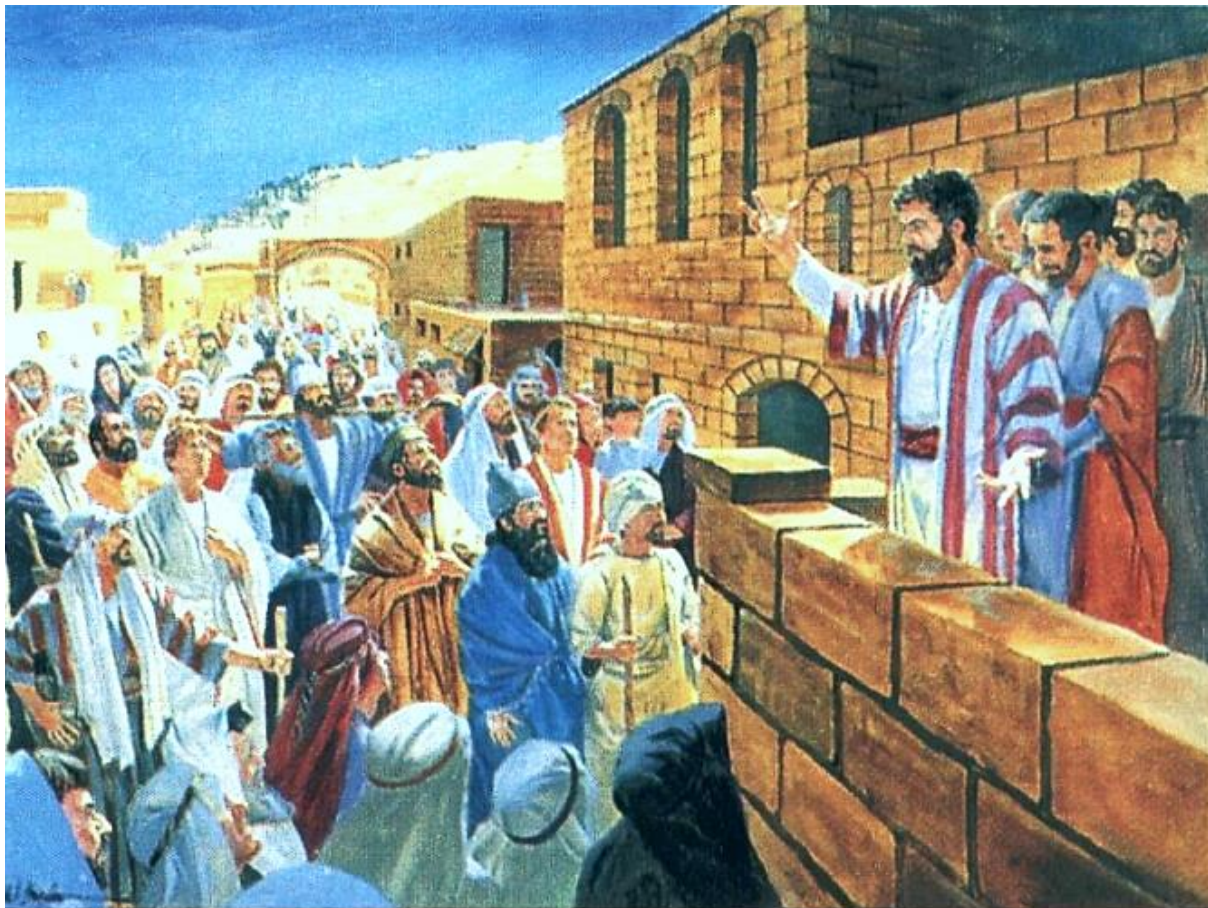
"You men of Israel, listen, hear these words I'm speaking: Jesus of Nazareth, a man that you should have known was approved of God among you by all the miracles, wonders, and signs, which God did through Him as He lived among you. You know all this, it all happened opening before you all. Him, according to the will of God from ages passed, as planned by the wisdom of the Lord, you have taken Him and through wickedness you put Him to death by slaying Him by the means of crucifixion. But God has raised Him up, resurrected Him to glory, loosed Him from the snare of death, for it was impossible that death should rule over Him.

For David was inspired to tell us that God the Father saw His Son living and so death would not reign over Him: 'I foresaw the Lord always before me, for He is on My right hand' and Jesus then replies in David's writing: 'I should not be moved from life by death. Therefore my heart did rejoice, and I spoke with gladness, and I knew my flesh would rest in death in hope. For you would not leave my life in the grave, nor would your Holy One see corruption of His physical body. You have made know to me the ways of life; and you shall make me full of joy with your face and mind towards me, to deliver me from the physical death' (Ps.16:8)" (Acts 2:22-28).

Peter was not through with speaking. He again lifted up his voice with power and said:

"Men and brethren, let me speak frankly to you about the patriarch David. He is both dead and buried, his grave remains with us to this day. He was a prophet and was inspired to know that just as God had sworn with an oath to him, that of his very fleshly descendants, He would raise up the Messiah to sit on his throne so seeing all this beforehand, he spoke of the very resurrection of Christ, that His life would not be left in the grave, neither would His physical flesh see corruption.

This Jesus the Christ, God has indeed then raised up from the dead, and we, His disciples, are witness to this fact. He is now at the right hand of God in heaven, exalted in glory. And we having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has given to us this gift of the power of His Spirit, that you are now seeing and hearing.



Peter Addresses the Crowds on the Day of Pentecost

For we know that David, the man, did not go up into heaven where God is, but David himself foretold that: 'The Lord said to my Lord, sit you upon my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool' (Ps.110:1) "(Acts 2:29-35).

This is one of the clearest passages in the New Testament showing that at death we do not go to heaven where God the Father and Jesus are living. We are not born with an immortal soul. We die and rest in death until the resurrection day at the coming of Jesus in glory to sit on David's throne and rule the earth, when His enemies will indeed be under His feet, under His rule and authority. Jesus was raised back to life from the dead, but raised to glorious immortal life, to go back to heaven and sit at the right hand of the Father UNTIL the Father sends Him back to earth to rule all nations for a thousand years (see Revelation 20).

And because of this magnificent truth Peter went on to say:

"Therefore let all the house of Israel know as a sure thing, that God has made that same Jesus, whom you crucified, both LORD and CHRIST" (verse 36).

Jesus is not only SAVIOR, the anointed Messiah, but He is MASTER, and ruler of the earth when the Kingdom of God comes to earth in a very literal way.

When the people listening to Peter heard all that he was telling them, they were smitten in their hearts with conviction of it all being very true, as to what Peter had said to them.

They then cried out with sincere hearts, "'Oh, men and brethren, it is indeed so true....what then must we do?' And Peter looking at them and feeling the full inspiration of God, replied: 'REPENT, and be BAPTIZED every one of you in the NAME of Jesus Christ FOR the REMISSION of SINS, and you shall then RECEIVE the GIFT of the HOLY SPIRIT! For the promise is towards you, and to your children, and indeed to ALL that are far off, even to as many as the Lord our God shall CALL'" (verses 37-39).

We note here the last words. As we saw in the Gospels, God must CALL people to His salvation, open up their deceived and blinded minds, so they can understand spiritual matters of truths from His word. Then as Peter said IF they will REPENT and be BAPTIZED in the name of Jesus Christ, God has promised to give them His Holy Spirit.

We see here the basic ONE and TWO of the way to enter into salvation, and into a relationship with the Father and with His Son Jesus the Christ. There may be at times some exceptions to this basic way, but God makes those exceptions, not us (sometimes giving His Spirit to some people BEFORE baptism - yet they should still be baptized - we'll see this exception later in the book of Acts).

Peter it is recorded by Luke, spoke many other words to them on that day of Pentecost. The main important words are recorded for us. The words Peter spoke were given so the people hearing could save themselves from that wicked and crooked generation (verse 40).

Many did harken to the words of Peter and gladly repented and were baptized. On that one day alone, there were about three thousand lives won for the Lord. All of them continued with a steadfast heart in the apostles teachings and fellowship. They

"broke bread" together, a phrase used to denote the fellowshiping of eating meals with each other. And they continued in PRAYERS! Most important at this time of the birth of the Christian New Testament Church of God. Yes, it would be very natural and very spontaneous, for prayers to be given by God's children at this time, as it was the start of a spiritual movement that later one ruler would say (as we'll come to in the book of Acts) "turned the world upside down" (verses 41-42).

So powerful was the Holy Spirit in the lives of the apostles and others that Luke says "fear" came upon every person, because of the wonders and signs that were done by the apostles (verse 43).

Believers Share Things Among Each Other

All the followers of Jesus, old and new, were together in Jerusalem, and they had all things in common Luke reports in Acts 2:44. This he goes on to explain in verses 45 to 47. People were willing to sell their possessions and their valuables of what sort they were, and then distribute money or goods to every believer as every person had need.

You will notice the words "as every man had need" - this was not a practice of "communism" or dividing everything equally to each believer and follower of Christ. Goods and money were given out AS NEEDED by each individual. Obvious to some were given more and to some were given less, as each person in their situation of life had need.



The early church was eager to make sure no-one was in want of anything needed

The new "church of God" had increased by thousands in a matter of a few days, starting with about 3,000 being baptized on the day of Pentecost alone. They were not leaving for their homes in various parts of the Roman Empire - they were staying on in Jerusalem, rejoicing in the truth and new found faith of God in Christ Jesus as Messiah and Savior. Many would have run out of money, or food, or whatever else would be needed to stay on in Jerusalem and not return home for a while.

This situation was a unique circumstance in the history of those called to salvation by the heavenly Father, and so it called for much personal sacrifice from Christ's disciples who lived in the area of Jerusalem, and who had wealth of one kind or another. It called for a real "giving and sharing" of their wealth to those who needed physical things to enable them to stay on in Jerusalem and not return home for a period of time, that they had not planned for when they came to Jerusalem to observe the feast of Pentecost or First-fruits.

It was a natural thing to want to stay around and learn from Jesus' twelve apostles and to grow in grace and knowledge of many of the truths of God's word that they were now learning.

So all those many new, and 120 or so old disciples of Jesus, continued daily with one mind-set, worshipping in the Temple (the temple in Jerusalem as still God's Temple and was still a place to meditate and worship in), and eating meals together (breaking bread from house to house, means eating meals together in fellowship, and has nothing to do with taking the bread and wine as in the memorial of Jesus' death in the Passover service). This they did with gladness and with a pure heart of devotion towards God. They were praising the Father in heaven for His grace and truths. They were model, well-mannered, friendly, courteous, joyful people, and so it is recorded that they were well favored by all the people in Jerusalem and area.

As each day went by God added more and more to His church and to the way of salvation (Acts 2:44-47).

CHAPTER 3

PETER'S SECOND SERMON

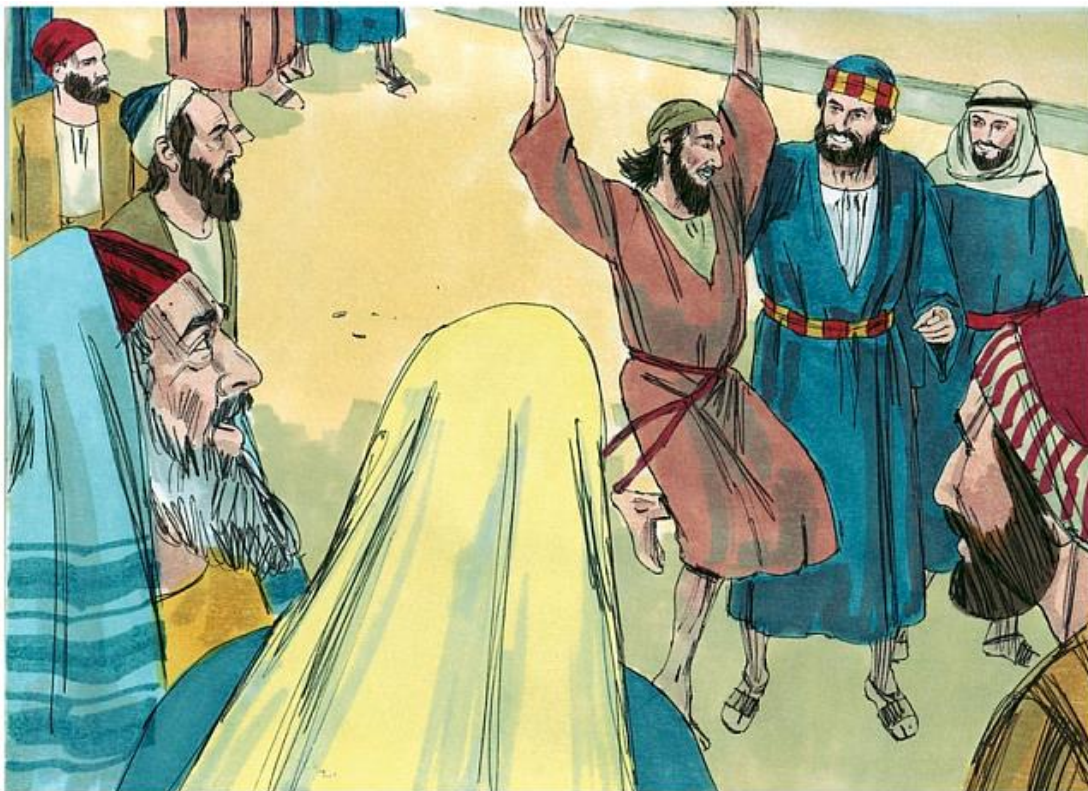
Acts 3

It was the ninth hour, or about 3 p.m. as we reckon it, and Peter and John went up into the Temple at Jerusalem. It was the hour of prayer. This time of the day to pray in the Temple was a Jewish tradition and has no support for being done from any Old Testament Scriptures.

A man was at the gate of the Temple, called "Beautiful" - he had been born lame and had to be carried there. He was there to beg for money or food from those entering into the Temple. He saw Peter and James about to go into the Temple and asked for money. Peter turned and looked compassionately at the lame man, John also, but it was Peter who spoke:

"Look upon us lame man," and the man indeed did do so for he expected they would give him some money. "Silver and gold we do not have, but that which we do have I will give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, I want you to stand up and to walk."

Peter reached out and took the man's right hand in his, and lifted him to his feet, and at once the man's ankles and feet received full strength. The man could feel the strength surging into his ankles and feet, and with no hesitation he leaped up and stood, and immediately walked also. He walked with Peter and John into the Temple, not only walking but leaping around like a young lamb. He was loudly praising God.



God heals the lame man through Peter

What a great miracle this was. The man had never walked, he was born lame. Yet in seconds he was walking and leaping. Think how a small child must "learn" to walk, but this man had that miracle given him also....walking and leaping in seconds. The people who saw him and knew him for many years, were witnessing to him now leaping around and to his praise to God. They knew this man very well for they had seen him at the Temple gate each day for many years. The people were filled with utter amazement and wonder at what they were now witnessing as to the condition of this man's feet and legs on that afternoon, in the Temple of God (Acts 3:1-10)

The man who had been healed of lameness was not letting Peter and John out of his sight, he was at times holding on to them, everyone so knew that it was they who had done this miracle. As you can imagine hundreds soon gathered around the three of them. They were in the area of the porch that is called "Solomon's Porch" and the crowd was questioning and in transfixed wonderment.

It was a great opportunity for Peter to bring another sermon on the recent truths of God at this time in history, he opened his mouth and said:

"You men of Israel, why do you marvel at this miracle, and why do you gaze on us as if mesmerized? You may think that what you are seeing was done just by us. No, it was not our holiness or our power that made this man walk!

"The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, who has glorified His Son Jesus; who you delivered up and denied Him in the presence of Pilate when he was about to let Him go free. Yes, but you denied the Holy One and the Just, and you desired a murderer to be granted life. And you wanted killed the Prince of Life, He whom God has raised from the dead to immortal life, as we His disciples are witness to.

"And it is through faith in His name that made this man strong and able to walk, and you have known this man for many years: yes, the faith which if from Him had given this man perfect soundness right in the presence of you all.

"I know it was through ignorance that you killed the Son of God, so also your rulers, they were ignorant also. But God had planned long ago, as testified by the mouth of the prophets, that Christ should suffer. Well it has all been fulfilled.

"You need to REPENT now, and you need to be changed in your heart and mind-set, so your sins can be blotted out, so that times of spiritual refreshing can come to you from the presence of the Lord. And He will send Jesus Christ to you through His spirit, which was before preached to you that this was God's purpose and plan.

"The heaven must for now keep this Jesus but only until the promised restitution of all things to come on earth, as the holy prophets spoke and wrote about from the very beginning of this creation on earth.

"Even Moses said unto the fathers, 'A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you from your very own people, like as I am one of God's prophets. Him you will listen to in all the things that He shall say to you. And it shall come to pass eventually that every person who will not harken and obey that prophet shall be destroyed from among the people who do hear and obey.

“Yes, all the prophets from Samuel and all who came after him as prophets, as many as have spoken about these matters, did indeed foretell all that has taken place in these last number of days.

“You are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, 'In your ancestry shall all the peoples of the earth be blessed.'

“It is to you first that God, after raising up this Jesus, His Son, sent word to bless you, that in turning each of you away from your iniquities" (Acts 3:12-26)

Acts 4

Priests And Sadducees Upset

With such a large crowd around Peter and John and the man healed of lameness, it was not long before the Temple Priests, Temple guards and the Sadducees (who were in charge of the working of the Temple) came a flying to see what was going on. After hearing the words of Peter and realizing the resurrection of the dead was being taught through this man called Jesus (the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection), they were mightily grieved, and so upset were they that they told the Temple guards to put them in the "hold" (type of jail) until the morning because it was now evening time.

Yet even with this show of disdain from the Sadducees, about FIVE THOUSAND that heard the message of Peter DID believe all that he taught (Acts 4:1-4)

Peter And John Before Jewish Rulers

The next day many of the rulers, and elders, and scribes of the Jewish people, came together with Annas the high priest and those who were his close relatives. They all gathered in Jerusalem. Peter and John and the man healed of lameness were brought before them all and this question was asked them: "By what power or by what name, have you done all that you did in the Temple yesterday?"

Peter...was silent for a few seconds, then looking steadfastly at them all, and being filled with the powerful inspiration of the Holy Spirit, said:

"You rulers of the people, and you elders (older men who were looked upon as having much wisdom) of Israel. If we are being examined for the good deed and work we have done towards this man who was lame and who is now walking and dancing, then let it be known to you, and to all the people of Israel, that by the NAME of JESUS CHRIST of Nazareth, whom you decided to crucify, whom God in His power RAISED up from the dead, even by HIM does this man stand here before you all being healed.

“This Jesus is the stone which was set at naught, as worthless by you builders, and which had become the HEAD corner, the most important stone of the building.

“Neither is there SALVATION IN ANY OTHER, for there is NO other name under heaven given among mankind through which we must be saved" (Acts 4:5-12).

Rulers Try To Stop The Apostles Preaching

At these words the rulers were shocked and yet also marvelled, for they knew the men before them were not from among the noble, high-class, well educated, people of the nation, but in their eyes looked upon as "country-bumpkins" or "prairie cowboys" or "back-woods-men" as we might put it in our modern phrases. But they did realize and took note that these men had been with Jesus.

The lame man was standing right in their sight, no longer lame, but strong in his legs and feet, and they could not deny it, so they were wise enough to keep their mouths shut, they said nothing against what was obviously a miracle standing before them.

They told the three men to go to one side out of the council chambers, and they scrummed down as the football players do before their next move on the opposition. One said, "What on earth are we going to do with these men? For a great and noble miracle has been done in the sight of all in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it, it's impossible to deny it." Another then answered, "Yes, that is correct, what you have said. But we must try and contain the matter that it spread no further than this city. So let us tell these three men that they are forbidden to speak about this miracle through this Jesus Christ man to any other person."

The Jewish rulers thought they had a pretty good plan with this idea, so they called Peter, John, and the man healed from lameness, and commanded them to not speak or teach in the name of Jesus.

Peter and John looked at each other for a split second and then without hesitation replied, "Is it right in the sight of God to harken to your commands or to God's commands? Now you judge that! Because we CANNOT but speak the things which we have SEEN and HEARD while with Jesus."

Now the rulers grew angry, shouting, and spitting, red in the face, and screamed out other threats to them. But because they could find no real fault with them, so not able to punish them in any physical way, and because the people in Jerusalem were glorifying God for this miracle, they could simply once more just resort to emotional threats, and had to let them go.

The man on whom this mighty miracle was performed was about 40 years old. He had been a long time sitting lame at the Temple gate, more than one generation of people knew him and had witnessed the great power of God's Holy Spirit through the name and authority of Jesus Christ (Acts 4:13-22)

The Church In Prayer

Peter and John went to their own company of disciples and told them all that the Jewish rulers had said and done. On hearing this news the disciples lifted up their voices as one and said:

"Lord, you are God, which made the heavens and the earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: Who by the mouth of your servant David has said, 'Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against His Christ' (Ps.2:1). For it is true that against your holy child Jesus, whom you have anointed, both Herod

and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together; for to do what your mind and plan had determined to be done, from a very long time before.

“And now Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto your servants that with **BOLDNESS** they may **SPEAK** your words. And by and through your outstretched hand and power to heal, that signs and wonders may be done by the name of your holy child Jesus.”

“And when they had finished praying this prayer, the place where they were assembled together was **SHAKEN**, and they were all filled with more of the Holy Spirit, and they indeed did speak the **WORD** of God with **BOLDNESS**! (Acts 4:23-31).

Sharing Of Possessions

It was a time in the Church of God that all things were of one heart and one mind. This has hardly ever been seen since those early days as the rest of Acts and the New Testament clearly show. Strife and division was to come into the Church of God, but at this time there was full unity and oneness among all the disciples of the Lord Jesus. They had great **POWER** from the Holy Spirit, and that power was used for the glory of the spreading of the word of God and the way of salvation through Jesus Christ. It was with power that they gave witness to the resurrection to glory of Jesus the Christ. At this time God's grace was upon them all and they were protected from all evil and all the evil deeds that some would have liked to have done to them, because they taught Jesus and Him crucified and raised again to life eternal.

Many of the new converts, thousands by now, were still staying on in Jerusalem, still not wanting to leave but to fellowship with all the saints and to learn more about Jesus and the truths of the word of God. It was still a time for many who had stayed on to be physically helped with food, clothes, lodging, etc. It is written by Luke that there was not one who did not share with the others in whatever way they could give and share. Some were blessed with a house, or land, and were able to sell those things and so the money was brought to the twelve apostles, given to them, and hence money was distributed to those who needed it, and as they needed it. Again, no communism mind-set here. Money was given **AS** needed, in the amount each needed for his or her physical needs.

A man who was called by the apostles Barnabas (meaning "son of consolation"), a Levite from the country of Cyprus, he had some land which he sold, and gave the money to the apostles to be given in service to help those in need at this time.

We shall see in Acts 5 that the money people received from selling their houses and land was **ALWAYS** theirs, they having the authority over it at all times, and they could do with it whatever they chose. They could give it all to the "church" to help others, or part of it, any part of it. There was **NO** obligation that demanded it was all to be given to the "church." This serving and helping others at this period in the Christian church with physical possession or money was a voluntary, from the heart work, a giving as the Spirit of God led. Some gave more, some gave less, some gave all, and those who could not give **RECEIVED**. It must truly have been a blessed time for all the followers of Jesus (Acts 4:32-37).

CHAPTER 4

DECEPTION, PERSECUTION AND IMPRISONMENT

Acts 5

Here at the start of the New Testament Church of God it was a time of explosive growth in the area of Jerusalem, and it was a time for those who could give to indeed give to help in a physical way the thousands of new converts, many from far outside Jerusalem and even Palestine. For as we have seen many were staying on in the city of Jerusalem to fellowship and learn more from the apostles of Jesus, the truths of God's word.

In the context of all this needed "giving" and service to fellow believers there was a man by the name of Ananias, with a wife called Sapphirah. They had certain possessions they could sell to help out members of the Church of God. And they did sell that possession. We are not told what the possession was, and it really does not matter. But both Ananias and his wife Sapphirah undertook a spiritual and physical deception. They want to be known as being among the very generous ones who were selling things and giving the money to the apostles, so in turn that money could be used to help the brethren that needed help.

They came with the money and gave it to the apostles, telling them that it was ALL the money that they had received from selling their possession. This was NOT true, as they were holding back some of the money for themselves.

Peter, filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, was given inspired revelation that this couple were lying about the money they were giving being all the money from the sale of their possession.

"Why have you lied, " said Peter to Ananias, "Why have you allowed Satan to come into your heart to fill you with this deceptive plan for vain glory, while you lie about giving us all the money you have received?"

Was Ananias and Sapphirah NOT allowed to retain some of the money, or even all of it, if they chose? Was it an apostolic rule that people with possession should sell them and give all the money received from the sale to the apostles? NO, not at all!

Peter went on to say to Ananias, "Was not the possession yours to do with as you desired? Did we command you to sell it? And even after you sold it, was not the money yours to do with as you willed? Yes, it was."

Serving the brethren with physical goods and money at this special time was VOLUNTARY, no one was forcing or demanding anyone to do anything with their possessions.

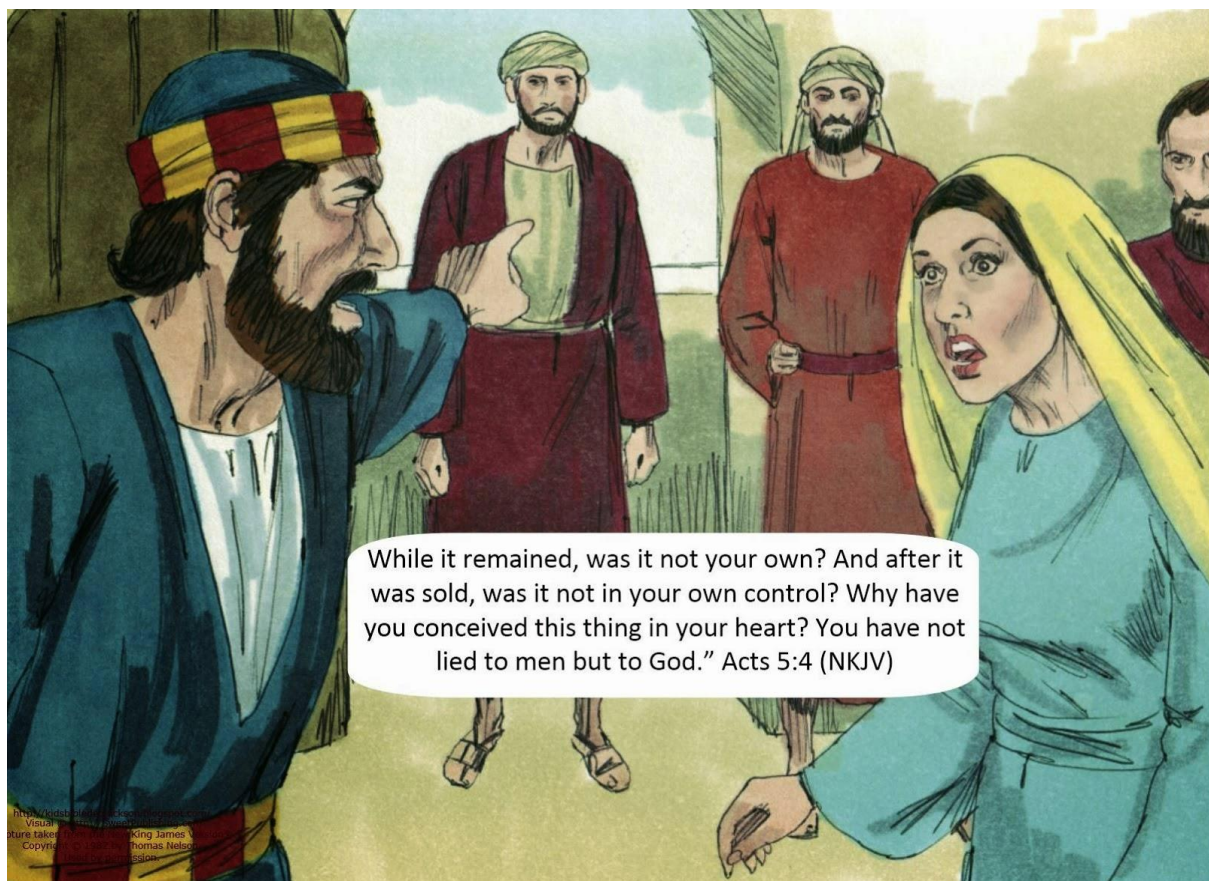
"You have lied to the Holy Spirit Ananias, " Peter went on to say, "You have not lied to men but to God," Peter finished with those words and we are told that Ananias upon hearing those words fell down and died. He was carried out and buried. It was soon known to all in Jerusalem what had happened and as you can imagine, great respectful fear came upon all who heard it.

About three hours later, and Sapphirah came in to see Peter. She had no idea what had happened to her husband.

Peter said to her, "Did you sell your possession for the amount of money you gave us?"

"Yes," answered Sapphirah, "We sold our possession and gave all of the money we received from it to you apostles."

"You and your husband have lied," Peter declared raising his voice in righteous indignation, "You obviously both agreed to lie about this matter, and to test the very Spirit of the Lord! Well, the feet of those who carried your dead husband out of here a little while back to bury him for his lie, are right at the door and shall carry you out," was Peter's last sentence to her.



Then Sapphirah also immediately fell down dead at Peter's feet. the men came in and indeed found her dead and carried her out and buried her next to her husband.

We are told again that great respectful fear came upon all who heard about this matter and to what had taken place (Acts 5:1-11)

The Spirit of God was moving in those days in ways that have not been repeated since. It was a time of super-natural power from God. We also note that the context of this event proves beyond question that not one person was commanded or forced into giving money to this special fund need for the brethren. It was all done out of a ready heart and mind, as the person or persons willed and determined. They were given full freedom to give to this, shall we call it, "poor fund" or "special needs fund"

for the brethren in need. They had full freedom to not give, neither God nor the apostles were demanding anything from anyone to support the "needy brethren" fund. And to try and use that situation to bring some kind of glory to yourself, among the brethren, with deceptions and lies, the Lord was not going to allow for one moment.

God was not allowing it those kinds of things to take place at that time and history of the Church of God. That does not mean to say God is still dealing out such penalties for deceptions and lies in the Church of God. The somewhat sober truth is that such deceptions and lies, and cover-ups, have taken place in the Church of God in our modern era, and the Eternal has NOT stopped it with such dramatic power. God deals with people and His family of children in different ways at different times. Sometimes He allows lies and deceptions in His Church to go unchecked for a time. But the truth eventually comes to light and then it becomes a TEST for what the people of God will do about it. Sadly, many fall and stumble and are willing to be corrupted, in fact it can be the majority who go this way. Then in such a circumstance the faithful righteous have to move out and away from the cancer of sin and Satan's mind-set.

More Signs And Wonders

The apostles were continuing to perform many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. For some reason not fully explained many of the Christian believers were meeting at Solomon's porch, an area of the Temple. Others who were not believers did not dare to join them, or try to disturb their meetings, those non-believers had very high regards for them. Each day more and more people (crowds of men and women is the way it is recorded) came to the saving knowledge and true way of the Lord God.

So powerful were the working miracles of the apostles that people were brought out on the streets on mats and sleeping bag type beds, just so the very shadow of Peter passing over them would heal them. Crowds came in from towns and villages around Jerusalem, bring their sick and those possessed by evil demon spirits, and they were all healed (Acts 5:12-16)

The Apostles Imprisoned

With all that was happening by the hands of the apostles of Jesus, the High Priest and the sect of the Sadducees, were filled with much indignation against them. They sent out the Temple guards and with the authority they had, the apostles were cast into the common prison of the Jews. But God sent an angel to open up the prison doors, and to bring them out. The angel said to them, "Go stand in the Temple and speak to the people all the words of this life and truths of the Almighty."

They were in the Temple early the next morning doing as the angel had told them. The same morning the High Priest, and those with him called for the Jewish Sanhedrin council (a body of chosen men to govern many of the physical and spiritual matters of the Jews) and the Senate or wise elders of Israel, came together in order to bring the apostles before them, to answer why they were continuing to teach in the name of Jesus, as High Priest and elders had told them not to do so.

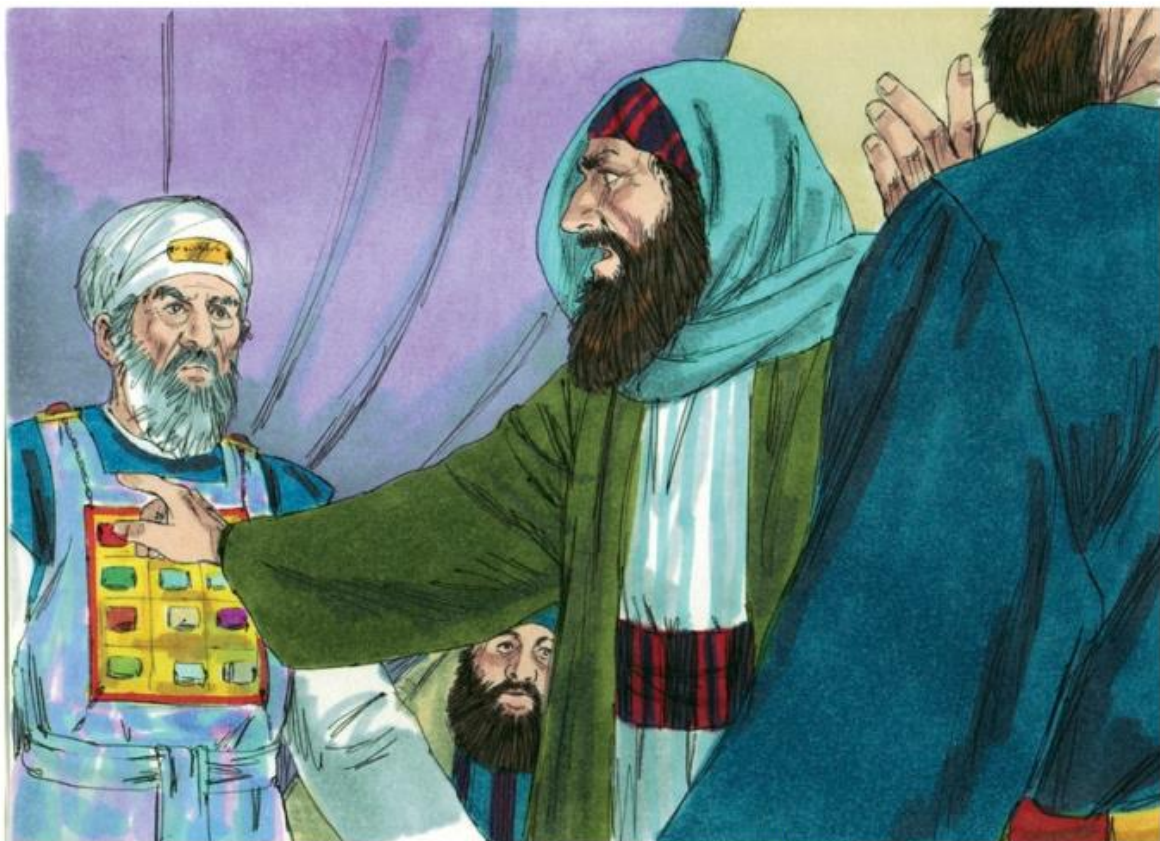
The Temple guards went to bring the apostles before this body of Jewish leaders, but of course the apostles were not in the prison. The guards said to the council, "The prison looked very normal, the doors shut in a locked and safe way, the prison guards standing outside the prison doors. But when we opened the doors, we found not one man inside."

The High Priest, captain of the Temple, and council were all perplexed and wondered where all these happenings would end up...just what on earth was going on they questioned among themselves. Then someone arrived to tell them that the apostles were out in the Temple teaching the people. The Temple guards were again sent out to arrest the apostles but in a manner that would cause no alarm or disturbance, for by now the council was afraid the people would turn on them in a violent way if they mistreated the apostles in any physical way.

The apostles were again standing before the Jewish council. "Did not we tell you not to preach in this man Jesus' name," declared the High Priest with some anger in his voice. "Instead, you have filled all Jerusalem with your teachings about Jesus, the one you claim was the Messiah, and you intend to blame us for His death!"

The apostles answered through Peter:

"We must obey God before we obey any man's authority. The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead after you killed Him by crucifying Him. Then God took Him back to heaven and put Him at His right hand as Prince and Savior. He has done all this to give the people of Israel an opportunity to turn from sin and turn to serving Him in spirit and in truth, and so sins could be forgiven. We are witnesses of these things and so is the Holy Spirit, which is given to all that will obey Him."



We must obey God before man!!!

Well at hearing these words the council was so furious that they decided to kill all the apostles. But one of their members, a Pharisees by the name of Gamaliel , an expert on Jewish religious law, and very well respected among all the people, had a different perspective on all that was taking place,. He ordered that the apostles be taken out of the council room for a while. Then he addressed his colleagues with these words:

"Men of Israel, you better take care on what you are planning to do with these apostles of this Jesus man. Some time ago there was that Theudas fellow, who claimed to be someone great. About four hundred others followed him, but he was killed and his followers all went their separate ways. The whole movement dissolved and came to nothing. After him, at the time of the census taking there came along the Judas of Galilee. He got some people to follow him, but he was killed also and all his followers were scattered. His movement amounted to nothing. So my advice is, leave these men alone, do no harm to them. If they are teaching and doing these things merely on their own steam and will-power, it will come to nothing but if it is from God, you will not be able to stop them. You will be seen by many as fighting against God Himself."

This is an interesting thought from Gamaliel. It has, or shall I say, can have, indeed truth to it. We know that in this particular case he was correct. We know this work of the apostles WAS FROM God, and it would have not come to nothing even if all the apostles had been killed. But we need to remember that these words from Gamaliel are not for EVERY SITUATION, they are not a catch all, perfect thought, for all and everything that comes along in the world of mankind. Not all human movements are from God, in fact it is probably safe to say that MOST religious or secular "movements" are not from god, that He really has little if anything to do with them, one way or the other. The facts are that many human movements (some even against the laws and ways of the Lord) do increase and do become large, and God is not with or behind such movements. Some of those movements of men get so strong and large that they influence the laws of Governments. An example would be the movements of the "gay and lesbian groups" to bring in Government laws to support "same sex marriages." The same can be said for the "abortionists" who have gained enough strength to have Governments enact "abortion on demand" laws.

In this case Gamaliel was correct, but his wise words for this situation at the time of the early months of the New Testament Church of God, does NOT apply to ALL cases of men's work in all circumstances, in all of human history. Many movements of mankind, that were only from men, have not been overthrown. Human history makes this very vivid. Of course if it is from God and you try to fight against it you are indeed then fighting against the Almighty, and will never win.

The council thought Gamaliel spoke well and they accepted his judgment. Probably God was in the minds of those men to make that decision, for it was not the will of the Lord that His apostles should die at that time.

The council did have the men "flogged" - a type of whipping. They had the freedom under Roman rule to so flog people as punishment for whatever wrongs the Jewish council deemed was wrong. It would seem the apostles did not appeal but took this flogging in stride, as part of suffering for the righteousness of God, no doubt thinking about what Jesus went through for being nothing but good and perfectly righteous. Sometimes a Christian just has to stand and take it as it comes. This is not always

what to do, and it is not always what God expects us to do, for we shall see later in the book of Acts that Paul sometimes fled from physical harm. But sometimes he stood and took the beating from others for teaching the truths of God. We have Paul in the latter chapters of Acts appealing to the high authority of Rome, being a Roman citizen he had the right to so appeal the harsh treatment the Jewish leaders were wanting to place on him. So running, appealing, or standing to "take it all" is an individual matter for individual situations, as guided by the Holy Spirit and the physical circumstances you are in. In the situation before us in Acts, the apostles stood and took what the Jewish council gave them - a flogging.

Once more the council ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and then let them go. The apostles left the high council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy by God to suffer dishonor in a physical way for the name of Jesus.

Every day the apostles continued to teach and preach in their homes and in the Temple about Jesus the Christ (Acts 5:17-42).

CHAPTER 5

NEW DEACONS AND THE DEATH OF STEPHEN

Acts 6

The Church of God had mushroomed rapidly in those early months since the feast of Pentecost and the physical administration of helping all the people that needed food and money was getting harder and harder for the apostles to take care of. It got so out of hand for them that those of Greek background and upbringing complained against those of Hebrew background and culture, because they said the widows among them were getting neglected, in physical matters. So the twelve apostles called the multitude of disciples together for an open meeting, and said to them:

"It is not reasonable that we should leave off the study and teaching of the word of God to attend to the administration of such things like placing food on tables for people to eat. So we want you brethren to pick out from among yourselves SEVEN men of honest business workings and having respect from all of you, who are also filled deeply with the Holy Spirit, and who are known to have wisdom. Then we apostles will appoint and set them over this physical administrative matter of making sure everyone receives what physical things they need. We apostles can then devote ourselves to prayer and study and teaching of the word of God."

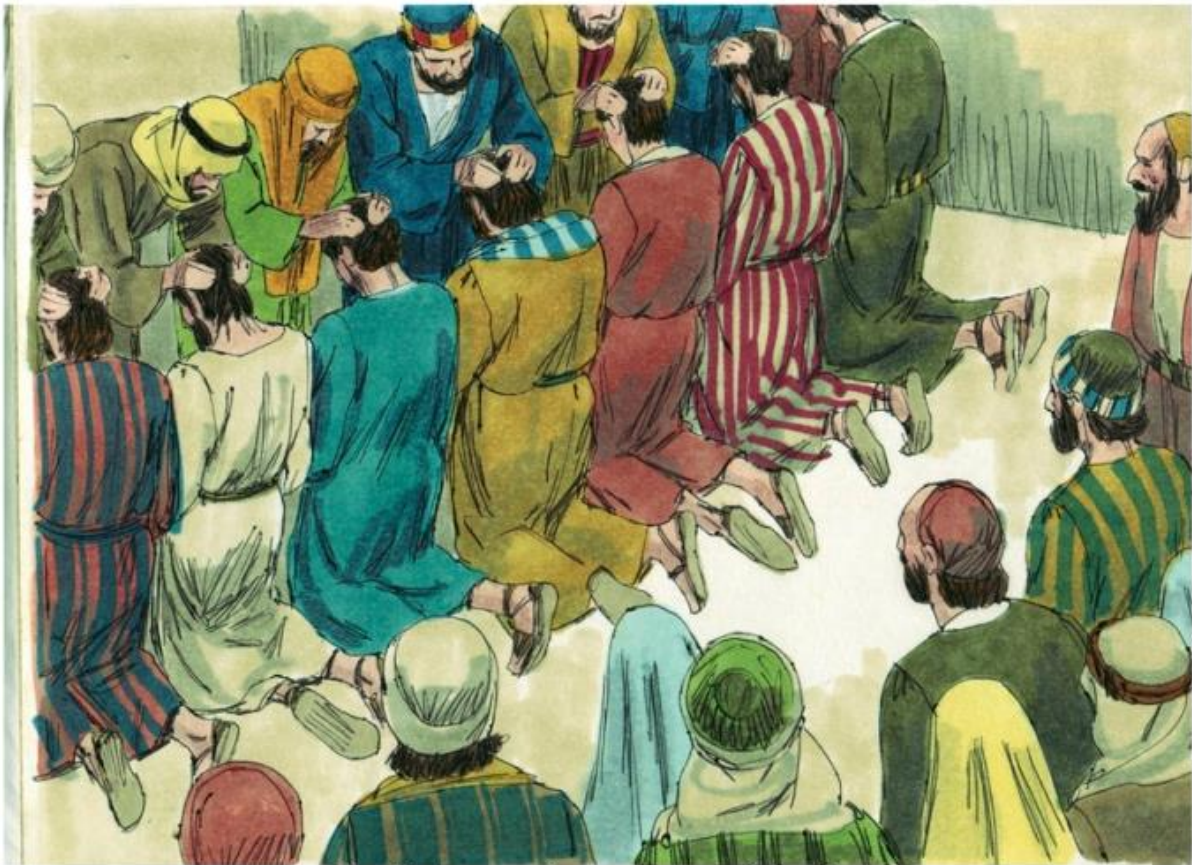
The multitude of disciples were very pleased with what the apostles suggested be done so things could be at peace between all of them. They chose, Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenus, and Nicolas a convert at first to Judaism, from Antioch. They set those seven men before the apostles: and when the apostles prayed, they laid hands on them, to dedicate them to the function of administering physical needs to the brethren.

This was a correct and wise administrative department that was created by the apostles, in fact it was so beneficial that Luke records for us that the word of God increased even more, and the number of disciples multiplied in Jerusalem GREATLY, even a part of the Jewish priesthood became converts and were obedient to "the faith" (Acts 6:1-7).

We need to note here that it is right and proper for physical administration functions to be created in the Church of God if there is a need for such functions. We need to note the basic qualifications required to function in that department within the Church. We need to note that the members of the congregation have a very important part to play in choosing the persons for this function. We also note that it is made very clear the spiritual leaders (more than one as we find in this example) have the final approval, it is recorded as "whom we" (that is the apostles or spiritual leaders) "may appoint over this business." And it is the spiritual leaders who prayed and laid hands on them. We must note as well that prayer and the laying of hands was performed in appointing the chosen persons to this administration duty.

And we must not forget that this function was first and foremost a physical function, for the handling of money, food, and all the physical things that God's children were in need of. It was not a spiritual function that they were appointed to, but a function of

"serving tables." But that does not imply that those chosen could not be used for spiritual matters IF God so decided. After all the bottom line is that God decides who he will use for spiritual matters, yet the first and original main intent in choosing those seven men was not to be spiritual leaders but to administrate correctly and wisely the physical matters of the Church of God. But we shall see immediately that the Lord did use some of those men in a mighty way teach His word and proclaim Jesus as the Savoir and Messiah.



The first seven deacons are ordained

There is nothing here to indicate anything "special" about choosing seven person. It would seem that the apostles thought seven would be what was needed to carry out this function they were being chosen for, with the number of disciples in Jerusalem being as many as they were. The number chosen could be any number that was needed to administer the physical matters of any given congregation at any given time.

One more lesson comes out in this example. The main function and duty for the spiritual leaders of a congregation is NOT to be working hard at physical matters within a congregation, but to be mainly having lots of time to be able to pray and study and teach the word of God.

Stephen Is Used Mightily By God

The power that Stephen had through faith was very great indeed, he did many mighty wonders and miracles, but we are not told any specific ones, just that he did them.

Certain ones from different synagogues throughout the Roman Empire, who had come to Jerusalem to observe the feast of Pentecost and had not yet returned home because of everything the new "Christian" sect was doing and saying, had disputation with Stephen over the word of God and Stephen's theological teaching. But they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he taught. so they hired people who said they heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God. Then they stirred up the people, some of the elders of the people, some of the scribes, and then had enough power to send the Temple guards to arrest him and bring him before the Jewish Sanhedrin council.

As Stephen stood before the council, false witnesses came forth and said, "This man does not cease but to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law of Moses. For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the rites which Moses delivered to us."

When all in the council looked at Stephen when these charges were uttered, they beheld his face as it was the face of an angel. We are not told how the face of an angel looks when talking to men, but it obviously looked much more radiant and striking than does a normal human face. Probably God was answering the accusations from those false witnesses, in such a way as to tell them what Stephen was being accused of was a huge bunch of garbage (Acts 6:8-15).

Acts 7

The High Priest turned to Stephen and said, "Are these things spoken of you true?"

Now, Stephen had the chance to speak, and from what he went on to say, they certainly allowed him to say his mind. He preached somewhat of a sermon to them, saying:

"Men and brethren and fathers, listen to me; The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, (now called Iraq) before he lived in Harran (Haran, a city in what is now called Syria). And God said to him, 'Get you out of your country, and from your relatives, and go into the land which I will show you.' And so he came out of the land of the Chaldeans, and dwelt in Haran; and from there, when his father was dead, he moved into this land, where you now live.

"God gave him no inheritance in it, no, not so much as a square foot; yet God had promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his offspring after him, when as up to that time he had no children, not one. The Lord had spoken to him and told him that his offspring would live in a strange land; and that they would come under bondage, and much evil would they experience for four hundred years. The nation that would put them under bondage God said He would punish, and then Abraham's offspring would come out of that land, and serve the Eternal God in the land where you now live.

"And He gave him the covenant of circumcision; and so Abraham had a son called Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac had a son called Jacob; and Jacob had the twelve sons who became the patriarchs. And they were moved with envy, and sold Joseph their brother into Egypt; but God was with him, and delivered him out of his troubles and afflictions. He gave him favor and wisdom in the presence

of Pharaoh king of Egypt, who eventually made him governor over Egypt as well as his own household.

“Now there came a famine over all the land of Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction there was, our fathers could not find enough food to live on. But when Jacob heard there was grain in Egypt he sent his sons, our fathers, out to seek favor in Egypt. It was on their second visit that Joseph made himself known to them, and Joseph's brothers were introduced to Pharaoh. After this Joseph sent to tell his father and all with him to come to Egypt. They all came to Egypt, and Jacob and all his sons died, and were taken over to Sychem, and put to rest in the grave site that Abraham bought for a sum of money from the sons of Emmor the father of Sychem.

“As the time drew near for God to perform that which He had promised to Abraham, the people of Israel grew very populous in Egypt. Then came another Pharaoh who did not care to remember Joseph. He dealt very deceitfully and harshly with our fathers, even to killing the new born children. At that time Moses was born pleasing to God. after being in his parents' house for three months, he was cast out into the river in a basket. It was Pharaoh's daughter that found him and adopted him as her own son.

“Moses was taught in the highest form of education in Egypt, and knew how to handle words exceedingly well. He also grew to be mighty in many deeds of valour. He had by the time he was forty years old come to know that he was an Israelite, and one day went out to walk and talk with his brethren the children of Israel. He saw an Israelite being treated by an Egyptian overlord in an evil and unfair manner. Moses got into a physical fight with the Egyptian and killed him. He thought his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them from Egyptian bondage through him. The next day as he walked among them he tried to stop an argument between two of them, by telling them that being brothers of the same family of people they should not quarrel and do wrong to each other. But the man who was mainly in the wrong pushed Moses away, and said, 'Well who made you a ruler and judge over us? Will you kill me, as you did the Egyptian yesterday?'

“Moses then knew that soon all Egypt would find out what he had done, so fearing for his life he departed Egypt and went to the land of Midian, and it was there that he married and had two sons. He lived there for forty years. Then one day the angel of God appeared to him in the wilderness of Sinai in a bush that looked like it was on fire. As he approach the burning bush the voice of God came to his ears, saying : 'I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' Moses was shaking and could not look at the flaming bush. The Lord continued to speak, 'Take off your shoes for the place you stand on is holy ground. I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, I have heard them crying and groaning, I have come down to deliver them from bondage. I will send you back to Egypt.' So Moses whom they refused forty years earlier saying, 'who made you ruler and judge over us?' is sent back by God to be ruler and deliverer. And after showing many wonders and signs in Egypt, he also led them to the Red Sea and led them through the wilderness for forty years.

“This is that same Moses which said to the children of Israel, 'God will raise up a prophet from among you like unto me, and Him you shall hear.' This man was the very one who was with that church in the wilderness, was the messenger that spoke to Moses in mount Sinai, and to the children of Israel, who received the life giving

oracles of writings, to pass on to us. But our fathers would not obey God and in their hearts went back to Egypt, even saying to Aaron, 'Make us gods to lead us, for this Moses we do not know what has become of him.' So a calf god was made from the physical things they had, and they bowed before it and did sacrifice towards it, and rejoiced in something that their own hands had made.

"God finally just turned them over to let them worship the many gods of heaven invented by men, as it is written in the books of the prophets, 'O, you house of Israel, Did you offer to me slain beasts and sacrifice, for forty years in the wilderness? Yes, physical sacrifices you did offer, but not to Me. You went in to the house and shrine of Moloch, and the star god Rephan, and the images you made to worship them, not Me. So, I will send you into captivity into a land far away in Babylon' (Amos 5:25-27).

"Our ancestors carried the Tabernacle they constructed with them through the wilderness. It was made in exact accordance with what had been shown to Moses by God. Years later when Joshua led them in the battles against the nations that the Lord drove out of the land, the Tabernacle was taken with them into the promised land. and it was used there until the time of David.

"David found favor with God and wanted to build a permanent Temple for Him, but was not allowed to do so. It was his son Solomon who actually did build it. However, the Eternal God does not live in physical building made by human hands, as the prophets say, 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Could you ever build me a temple like that? Could you ever build a physical dwelling place for me? No, not at all, for I have made everything in the heaven and in the earth' (Isa. 66:1-2).

"You stubborn people! You are heathen at heart and deaf to the truth of God. Must you always be resisting the Holy Spirit? Your fathers did and so you do also. Name just one prophet your ancestors did not persecute! They even killed the ones who predicted the coming of the Messiah - the righteous anointed One. And you betrayed and murdered Him. You have deliberately disobeyed God's law, though given to you through the serving function of angels" (Acts 7:1-53).

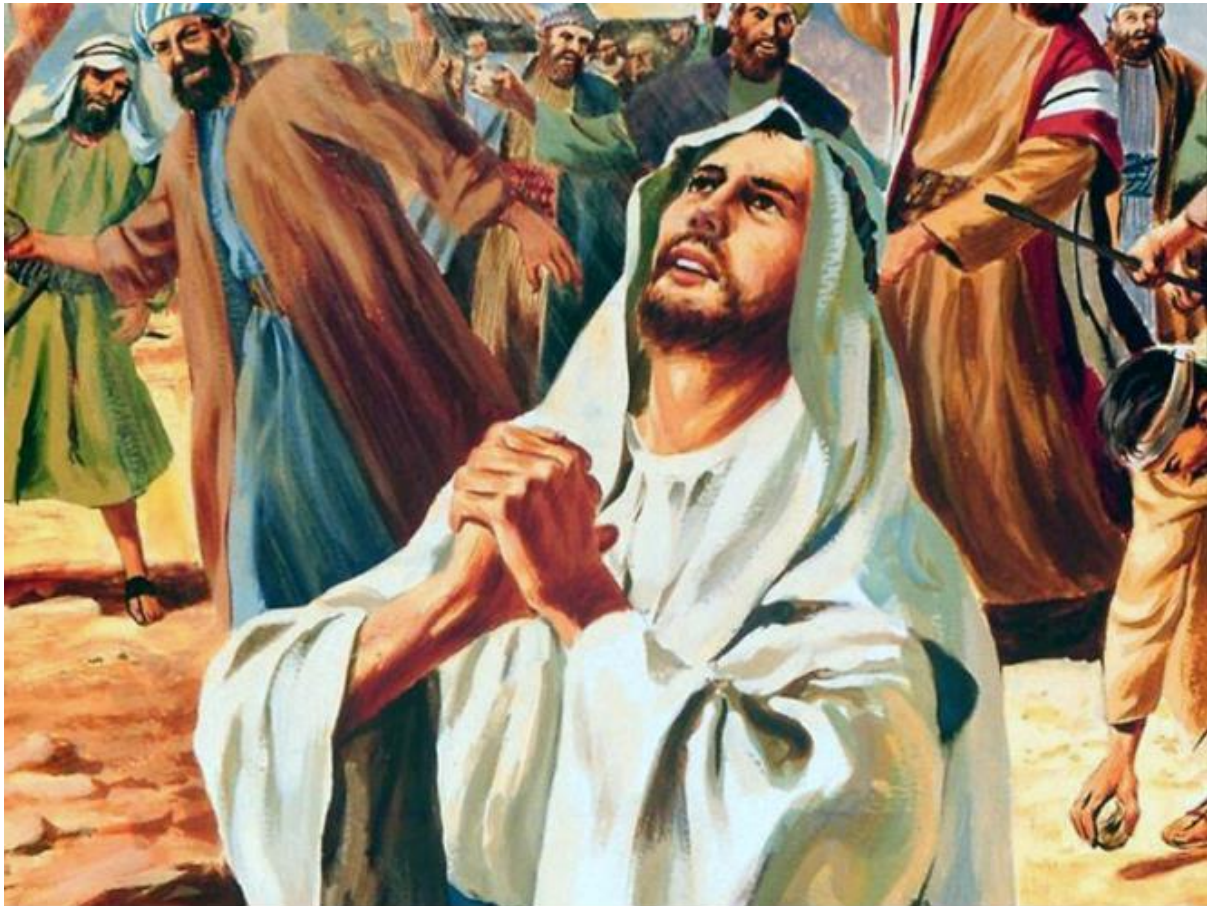
Well, Stephen's finally words cut like a razor sharp knife going through butter. They were cut in their hearts but immediately resisted the truth given to them, and snarled at him, or cursed him with their mouth and teeth.

Stephen looked up to heaven and with the power of the Holy Spirit, in the mind's eye, he saw into heaven, and beheld the glory of God the Father, and Jesus Christ standing at His right hand. Then, he proclaimed, "I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God" (Acts 7: 54-56).

They could take no more words from Stephen, they placed their hands over their ears, started to scream insults at him, and all with one accord ran towards him, some grabbing him with their hands and pulling him all the way out of the city. So worked up with fury and madness of mind they had determined to stone him to death. Some of the witnesses to all this also got into the act, they laid down their outer garments of clothing at the feet of one called Saul (the man who is more popularly known as Paul in the New Testament), and with many of the angry members of the Sanhedrin, they cast stones at Stephen until he was dead.

As Stephen was getting stoned to death, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." He then knelt down, shouted out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them."

Luke finished this account by writing, "And when he had said this, he fell asleep" (Acts 7:57-60).



Stephen about to be Stoned

We see again that the New Testament makes it very clear that death is a "sleep" not a continuance of life, as we saw Jesus taught in the Gospel of John chapter 11. It will take a resurrection to bring us back to life and to be with Jesus forever more. That resurrection to eternal glory life is when Christ comes again to earth, to set up the Kingdom of God. We covered all that in some detail as we went through the four Gospels.

What a sermon speech from Stephen this was, and the way he finished it....wow, he pulled no punches, told them like it was, called a spade a spade, laid the cards on the table, and they became so out of their minds, they could not think straight. Their emotions took control of their actions. Under Roman rule the Jews were not allowed to put a man to death. This was "mob mentality violence" - mob mentality gone wild.

There are times when a Christian, a true follower of Jesus, must speak up in no uncertain terms, with plain words, even cutting words, and in such a situation it may cost you your life, that is your physical life on earth. Being a true disciple of Christ can be tough at times, sometimes very tough indeed. It is then no wonder that Jesus said those who would follow Him, would and should "count the cost" (Luke 14:25-33).

CHAPTER 6

EVANGELISM SPREADS

Acts 8

It was at this time of the stoning death of Stephen that the followers of Jesus in the city of Jerusalem came under heavy persecution. We are not told exactly HOW and exactly WHY this persecution came about, only that it did, and in so doing the membership of the Church of God at Jerusalem was scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria. All except the apostles were scattered, so this amounted to MANY thousands of disciples of Jesus.

Stephen was buried and great lamentation was made for him, as the first Christian to die for his faith in Jesus as the Savior and Messiah.

The man Saul, who was there at Stephen's death and who consented to it, was in enough of a "religious office" in Judaism at the time, that we read "he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and hauling men and women out and putting them in prison" (Acts 8:1-3).

No doubt Saul (later to be known as the Christian apostle called Paul) in his unconverted, deceived, blinded to the real truth of the word of God, and Jesus as the Messiah, was part, maybe a large part, of the reason this persecution came upon the Church in Jerusalem. Zealous teachers of Judaism would have detested with a passion, this new "Jewish" Christian religion that was growing like a house on fire, for it would have been a threat to their "religious leadership" and, of course, to "money" that would no longer come to them, but go to this new religious "movement."

But because of the persecution, and the scattering of Jesus' followers, the Gospel was now being taught and preached in areas outside of Jerusalem and its immediate surroundings. We read in verse four of chapter eight, that the scattered disciples went everywhere preaching the word. Here is another verse of the Bible that has an instructive teaching for us, because it does not mean what many have casually supposed it to mean. For in chapter 11:19 we find the interpretation of what Luke wrote in chapter 8:4. Those scattered abroad went to the Jews ONLY with the Gospel. They had not yet in the time frame of chapter 8:4 learned or had it revealed to them to go to the non-Jewish peoples, or what in the New Testament is termed "the Gentiles."

This is a very good example of truth being "some here" and "some there" - part here and part over there, and only by reading the whole Bible and putting the parts together can we find the real truth of the matter. It is important that we read the whole Bible from Genesis to Revelation, and never read it with tunnel vision, or we will easily misunderstand or come to wrong ideas and beliefs.

Philip Goes To Samaria

We have seen then that chapter 11:19 interprets chapter 8:4. So when Philip went down to Samaria to preach the Gospel, he was preaching to Jewish people, or people of Israelite stock. Samaria in the New Testament time was not the Samaria of

the Old Testament age, it was only a certain relatively small area of land north of Jerusalem (see any Bible Map of New Testament Palestine, in the back of many Bibles). I showed you as we went through the Gospels that Jewish history proves that the Samaritans were Israelites not Gentiles. The Jewish Encyclopedia has a very long and detailed article on the Samaritans, which is very interesting and educational. They still exist today, but only as a very small sect.

Philip went and preached Christ to the Samaritans, and with one heart and one accord the people listened and gave heed to what he said (remember from John 4 how Jesus was readily accepted by them on one particular visit - "the woman at the well" account, as it is often called). They saw great miracles performed by Philip, which added to the impact of his teaching.

We can note here that God can use ANY person He chooses to teach His word and to perform miracles. People do not have to be part of the "chosen" or "ordained" ministry to be used by God in a mighty way. God is unshackled, He is not bound by men or organizations of men. As Jesus said, God could raise up the stones of the ground to preach His word, if He so desired.

The miracles that Philip did included evil spirits coming out of people, crying with loud voices, because they did not want to come out. Many that were lame were made to walk, and many with other sickness were healed.

It is written there was "great joy in that city." I guess so. Just try to imagine what it must have been like for those people. Think about some of those you know or see in your town who have crippling disabilities, and sickness of one kind or another. Now think about them all being healed....yes great joy indeed there would be.

Enter Simon The Sorcerer

Living in the city of Samaria was a local man of fame. His name was Simon. He was able to perform all kinds of marvellous things. We are told that he did it all through sorcery, witchcraft, or putting it in plain language, he did it all through the power of Satan the Devil. He was so miraculously powerful that he hood-winked the people. They thought he did all these wonders through the power of God. He had deceived and had a following that came from the least to the greatest, the uneducated to the well-educated, the simple poor people to the wealthy of the city. He himself made out to them that he was "some great one" - especially chosen and sent to them by divine plan. Yes, the people were fooled with his sorceries and so looked to him with some regard.

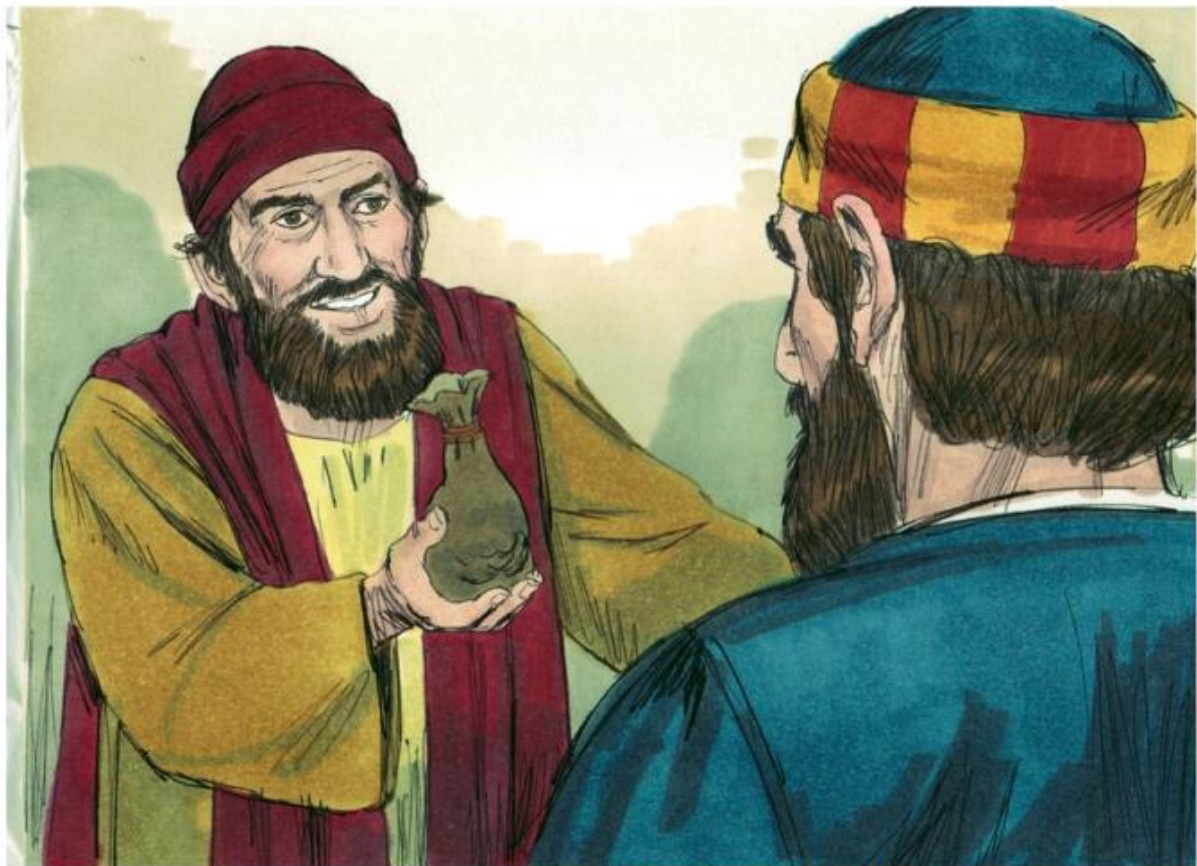
Yet, what miracles Philip did and what he had to say about the Kingdom of God and Jesus Christ, many believed him, men and women, and were willing to be baptized, for this new faith that was now being taught amongst them. Even Simon believed....well with a belief that had scheming motives behind it all as we shall presently see. He was baptized also and thereafter followed Philip around, amazed at all the miracles and wonderful signs he could perform (Acts 8:9-13).

Peter And John Come To Samaria

The news of how Samaria had heard and received the Gospel, soon got back to the apostles at Jerusalem. They decided to send to them Peter and John. When they

arrived they discovered (we are not told how, probably by divine insight) the Samaritans had not received the Holy Spirit, though they had been baptized in Jesus' name. So Peter and John started to pray for them. Probably through those prayers they were told by God that hands should be laid on them and then they would receive the Holy Spirit. Putting hands on people for various things like healings, blessings, and so forth, was often done, from ancient times, as we can find examples of this even in the book of Genesis (see the first verses of Gen.49, for one example).

When Simon of Samaria saw that through the laying on of hands people were receiving the gift of the mighty working power of the Holy Spirit, he offered money to Peter and John and said to them, "Give me also this power, that on whoever I lay my hands, they may receive the Holy Spirit also."



Simon the sorcerer tries to buy the power of the Holy Spirit

But Peter saw through the words and the mindset of this man, for there was selfish vain glory behind it all. Simon just wanted more fame, more adoration from people, more power, more human glory and human prestige. Peter answered him saying, "Your money perish with yourself, because you have thought that the gift of God can be purchased with money. You really do not have any proper part in this matter of God's truth and salvation; for your heart and mind is not in the right relationship with the Lord. You better repent of this wickedness, and pray to God, so if possible your thought of sin can be forgiven you. For I perceive that your mind is in the state of bitterness and in the chains of iniquity towards the way of God."

Simon knew Peter was correct, and knowing the power of the Holy Spirit that had been demonstrated to him and others, by Philip, and John, he asked Peter to pray

for him that no evil would come upon him. We are not told if Peter prayed for Simon. In fact we are not told anything else about this Simon in the New Testament. It all just stops right here, no more words are given to us concerning this Simon of Samaria, not from the New Testament anyway.

There are some secular histories that possibly show this Simon going to Rome and leading a sect of Christians in that city, eventually (over a few hundred years) forming what became known as the Roman Catholic church in Rome.

We see from this situation a lesson in how God wants the average person to receive the Holy Spirit. It is through of course preaching the word of God, the Gospel of the Kingdom, and the truth about Jesus the Christ. People can then repent (remember Acts 2:38) and be baptized. And those baptizing should pray and lay hands on those being baptized in Jesus' name. This is the basic one, two, three, steps for people to receive the gift of God's Holy Spirit. Can or will, God give His Holy Spirit before baptism and the laying on of hands? Well of course God can if He so chooses to do so, He is God and can do as He pleases, when He pleases. But in the overall way of things, for the most part, the Lord has given us what the one, two, three, steps for most people to receive his Holy Spirit, as a united part of our mind. Remember, the Spirit of God can and often does work with our minds before it is deeply united with the spirit of man that is in the mind of man.

Sometimes God has sent angels to work with people and to guide them and teach them and show them the things of Him. So He can send His Spirit likewise to work with people's minds before it becomes fully united with their minds in the special miraculous way the New Testament teaches. The example would be the apostles BEFORE the famous day of Pentecost of Acts 2 and the apostles AFTER the day of Pentecost, when the Spirit of God was in their minds and life in a way that it was not in them before Acts chapter two. It worked WITH them before Acts two, and was IN them on and after that day.

Peter and John stayed in Samaria for a while, preaching the word of the Lord, in many towns and villages, but then finally returned to the city of Jerusalem (Acts 8: 14-25).

Philip Sent On A Special Mission

Angels are often used as messengers of God, sent to relate something to a person from God. An angel was sent to Philip saying, "Arise Philip, go towards the south, to the way that goes down from Jerusalem into Gaza, which is desert area." It would seem not much else was told to him. But if an angel appeared to you out of the blue, and you understood it was from God, then you would probably not ask questions about what you are told to do. Philip did not ask why he should go in this direction, he just went, knowing God had a very good reason for the directive, and that he would find out in good time what it was all about, and why the Lord was sending him to this desert area.

When he got there he saw this Ethiopian man. It turned out he was a man of some great authority under the queen of Ethiopia called Candace. He was in charge of all her treasures of wealth. He was also a very religious man for we are told he had come to Jerusalem to worship. This might indicate that many in Ethiopia were God fearing people, maybe even the queen herself. Well this man was on his way back to

the queen in Ethiopia and sitting in a chariot and reading the book of the prophet Isaiah. The Spirit of the Lord told Philip to go up near to him that was sitting in the chariot. Philip did not just walk but ran to him, eager to do the Lord's will. Arriving close to the man he heard him reading aloud the prophet Isaiah. "Do you understand what you are reading," asked Philip. "Well I wish I did, " replied the Ethiopian, "How can I understand it, except I have some man to guide me. Will you come up next to me and sit with me and help me understand?"



Philip explains the prophecy in Isaiah about Jesus to the Ethiopian Eunuch

Philip was more than willing. He now fully understood why God had sent him on this mission to this desert place. We note that it is right and proper that God has people who know His word, to teach and lead others into the light of His word.

The Ethiopian man was reading the section in Isaiah that said, "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb, dumb before his shearer, so he opened not his mouth: He was humiliated and received no justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth" (Isa. 53:7-8).

The Ethiopian man looked at Philip and said, "I ask of you, can you tell me who the prophet is speaking about? Is it himself that he speaks about, or some other man?"

Philip, starting at those very verses in Isaiah, began to preach Jesus to this man. He expounded all the verses in the Old Testament that taught about the first coming of the Messiah. After all this teaching from Philip, they happened to be at a spot where there was a pond or small lake of water. The man from Ethiopia said to Philip, "Look, here we have enough water, what is there to prevent me from being baptized?" Somehow (maybe through what Philip had taught and told him) the man knew he should be baptized if he wanted to accept and follow Jesus as his personal Savior and as God's Messiah (the anointed one from God, as Messiah means - anointed one). Philip replied to his question, "If you believe with all your heart and mind, there

is nothing stopping you from being baptized. If you believe that Jesus Christ is the very Son of God, then you can be baptized."

The man commanded his chariot driver to halt, and both he and Philip went down into the water, and Philip did baptize him (Acts 8:26-38).

This was not just a quick, out of the blue baptism as such. You will remember we read that this man from Ethiopia had come to Jerusalem to worship the true God. He was already a religious man, who had obviously been reading the Scriptures for some time. He was not a new reader of the word of God. He just did not understand certain sections of the word. God wanted to bring this man into His family, He wanted to open his mind up to who the Messiah was, and to the way of salvation as promised from the very beginning. Philip had been especially sent to lead this man to that full knowledge, and really the only way, of salvation through Jesus as Savior. The man had already had the seeds of God's word planted in his mind, it just needed some watering, to bring forth the buds to ripen and open up to real life that was in Christ.

We must assume here that Philip knew, from the experience in Samaria, and with Peter and John being there to teach, that the laying of hands and prayers should follow baptism, and that Philip would have also done that after baptizing the Ethiopian.

After they had come up out of the water (here is pretty clear proof that baptizing was done fully in water, not just a few sprinkles of water over the head of someone. The Jews themselves had a baptism of full immersion of a person, who was being brought into their "religion" - so baptism was not an unknown ceremony at all for people in those days) the Spirit of God "caught away Philip" as the old KJV puts it, and the Ethiopian man saw him no more, but he went on his journey back to his queen in Ethiopia, rejoicing in the truth he had been taught (Acts 8:39).

Philip being caught away, may have been a miraculous miracle from God, then it maybe just a way to tell us that the work of Philip had been done and it was time now to go on to other work the Lord had for him. Philip was found then, after this event, to be in Azotus, and passing along to Caesarea, he preached in all the towns along the way (Acts 8:40).

We can learn from this example set before us that baptizing someone does not have to be done by the "appointed ministry" - Philip was not appointed as a "minister" per se, as we often think of the word "minister" but was appointed to "serve tables" - to do and take care of physical matters within a group of God's people (see again Acts 6:1-7). But as I've pointed out, God can use anyone He so desires to teach His word and to baptize people in Jesus' name. We shall see this again in chapter 9 of Acts when a disciple called Ananias is sent to baptize Saul at his conversion time, who became known as Paul. Ananias was simply called a "disciple" - the Greek word used everywhere in the New Testament for a follower of Christ, or a disciple.

So with all this understanding, we can readily know that when the Ethiopian man was back in his home country, he would have no doubt, preached and expounded the word of God to others, as it had been expounded to him by Philip. And he would have baptized people in Jesus' name, who in turn would have taught the word of the Lord to others and baptized people in Jesus' name.

The word of God was now beginning to go forth in a larger and larger way. It was at this time that the Father in heaven was to call a man to His family and to His ministering of preaching His Gospel, that would really begin to reach the whole known Roman world of that day.

CHAPTER 7

THE CONVERSION OF SAUL

Acts 9

Saul was introduced to us briefly at the beginning of chapter eight. While the Gospel was now going further afield, Saul was busy as a beaver trying to stop this new "Jewish sect" and following of this man known as Jesus Christ. He went to the High Priest in Jerusalem and desired official letters from him regarding the city of Damascus (a city about 60 miles north-east of the Sea of Galilee, or about 150 miles north-east of Jerusalem) and that if he found in the synagogue there anyone of "the way" (as the Jesus' movement was now being called by some), whether man or woman, he might bring them bound with ropes or chains, back to Jerusalem.

He was granted this official letter from the High Priest and set out for the city of Damascus. He was very near the city, when.....all of a sudden out of the blue sky a blinding light came and covered him. Saul immediately fell to the ground in a shock of panic.

Then to his utter surprise he heard a voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" And Saul, with a trembling voice replied, "Who are you, Lord?" Saul obviously had enough sense to know this person speaking to him was a "lord" or "master" of something much greater than he was, something of the supernatural. He did not as yet know it was Jesus speaking to him, but he sure had enough respect towards whoever the voice belonged to, that he automatically called him "lord."



Saul (Paul) is struck down on the road to Damascus

And the Lord answered, "I am Jesus whom you persecute: it is hard for you to kick against the thorns." If you try to kick against sharp objects that cannot be removed, you will only do yourself injury. Saul was waging war against someone whom he could never defeat, and only bringing harm upon himself, as a man bashing his head against a brick wall. The brick wall will never collapse, only the man's head will get smashed up.

Saul, on hearing the reply from Jesus, started to shake, literally, in his boots as we say. He was astonished and cried out, "Lord, what is it that you want me to do? And the Lord said, "I want you to get up and go into the city, and when you are there it will be told you what you must do."

The men who accompanied Saul were speechless. They heard a voice but could not see what Saul was seeing, they could see no form of a man as Saul could see. Saul got up from the ground, and when he looked around he saw no man or anything, for he was blind. They had to lead him by the hand into the city of Damascus. He was three days not being able to see anything, and he was so shaken up by his experience that he did not eat or drink during those three days (Acts 9:1-9).

Ananias The Disciple Is Sent To Saul

There was living in the city of Damascus a disciple (he is not called any other name but "disciple" - the common Greek word used throughout the New Testament for a follower of Jesus) by the name of Ananias. The Lord came to him in a vision and said, "Ananias!" And Ananias replied that he heard Him. And the Lord then continued to say, "I want you to arise and go to the street which is called 'Straight' - there inquire in the house of one called Judas, for the man called Saul of Tarsus - he is praying, and has seen in a vision a man called Ananias coming to him, and putting his hands on him, that he might have his eye-sight restored to him."

Well Ananias was a little stunned at what the Lord was telling him to do. "Lord," said Ananias, "I have heard about this man Saul, and how much evil he has done to all the saints in Jerusalem. And I understand from others that he has official letters from the High Priest to put in chains all that call upon your name."

But Jesus answered, "You must go Ananias, and do what I have told you, for this man Saul is a chosen one I will use, to declare my name and word before the Gentiles, and before kings, and to the children of Israel in general. For I will show him how sometimes great things one must suffer for my name's sake."



Paul after his conversion begins proclaiming that Jesus was the prophesied Messiah

Ananias did as the Lord commanded him. He came into the house where Saul was, and putting his hands on him said, "Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared to you on the road to Damascus, has sent me, so you might receive again your sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Immediately as Ananias spoke these words, it was as if scales of callous skin fell from Saul's eyes, and in a short time he again had vision. He then arose, went with Ananias to where there was a body of water and was baptized.

Saul then began eating again and soon felt physically strong once more. He stayed in Damascus for some days with the disciples of Jesus.

Just about immediately Saul started to preach in the local synagogues that Jesus was indeed the Son of God. He surely knew it was true, for Jesus had personally appeared and spoken to him as we have seen.

All that heard him speak were amazed for they said among themselves, "Is not this the same man who destroyed, those in Jerusalem, who called on the name of this Jesus man, and did he not come to Damascus with the intent to bring back in chains, to Jerusalem, and the high Priest, those who believe on this Jesus?"

But Saul just increased more and more in the ability to preach Jesus, confounding the Jews which lived in Damascus, proving that Jesus was indeed the very Christ, or Messiah (Acts 9:10-22).

Activity Of Paul From His Own Words

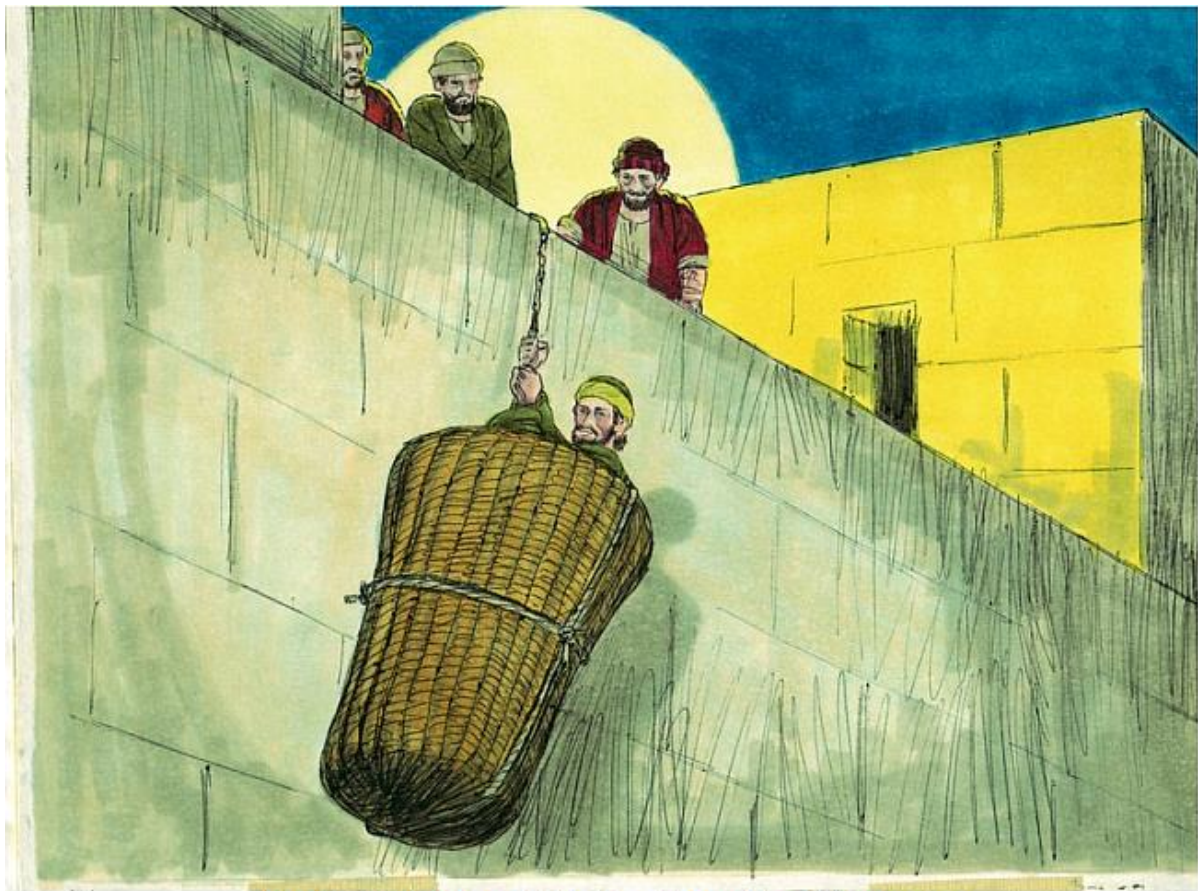
From here on we shall call Saul by his more familiar name of the New Testament - Paul. Luke does not record for us all the details of Paul's life in those early years of being converted and preaching in Damascus. It is Paul himself who fills us in on the important parts of those details in his early conversion years. We find the information in Paul's book of Galatians. He is telling the Galatians that the Gospel he preached to them was not from any human man that he received it, but from Jesus Christ Himself, in revelation (Gal.1:11-12). He reminds them about his pre-conversion days, and his profitable skill of anyone in his nation, in the "Jews religion" and of his extremely zealous life in the traditions of the fathers of the Jews religion (verses 13-14).

We need to bear in mind that these words in Galatians about "the Jews religion" has no direct bearing on what was the true way and true understanding of the Scriptures. He is simply telling us that he was mighty and zealous in the traditions of the Jews religion that he was part of. It is in Philippians chapter three that Paul tells us that he was of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews, and as concerning religious faith, he was a Pharisee. And with zeal he persecuted the Church of God. As concerning the letter of the law and the righteousness which is in the law, as governed by the Pharisee religion, he was blameless. But what he thought was profit and gain in all of that, he found to be just a loss, for to gain and profit in Christ. He went on to say that it did not matter what he looked at in his life, he was happy to see it all as a loss, if he could gain the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord. He counted all that he had in his pre-conversion days to dung, in comparison to winning Christ, and having Jesus in him to fulfill the true righteousness of God through faith (Philippians 3:5-9 and Gal.2:20).

Going back to Galatians chapter one. Paul tells us that God called him, and called him to preach Jesus among the heathen. And that in that calling he did not confer with other human beings. He did not go up to Jerusalem to confer with the twelve apostles. But he tells us that he went into ARABIA, and then, after whatever time he was in Arabia, he returned to Damascus (Gal.1:15-17).

We gather from this information from Paul that he was taught all the details of the Gospel from Jesus Christ Himself while he was in Arabia - like having a personal College course on the truth of God's word from Jesus Himself. Knowing this fact then helps us to understand while Paul could be so bold, so very bold at times, in what he taught, as being the very truth from God, and as to why he never backed down from anyone with that truth, not even from any of the apostles, who were apostles before his conversion. Read the second chapter of Galatians and this is made very abundant as to what I have just stated about the authority of Paul. He was indeed taught by Jesus personally while in Arabia.

After his college course in theology from Jesus, he tells us he came back to Damascus. Then after three years of teaching and preaching in Damascus he finally went up to Jerusalem and visited with Peter and James the Lord's literal half-brother. But he did not visit with any of the other apostles at that time (Gal.1:18-19).



Paul is lowered outside the city walls of Damascus

Returning to Acts 9, Luke picks up his story when Paul is back in Damascus after being in Arabia (as Paul told us in Galatians), with the words he writes in verses 23-25. Paul was now back in Damascus and had been there for three years preaching and teaching Jesus. Finally after this three year period, the unbelieving Jews had

had enough of Paul, and gathered together to decide how they could kill him. Those Jews watched the city gates day and night intending that when he came through them, they would at that time, kill him. But their clandestine plan came to the knowledge of Paul and the disciples in Damascus. The disciples told Paul he just had to get out of that city and go elsewhere, or he would end up as a dead man. Paul agreed that it was true. He knew he had to flee Damascus. The disciples took Paul during the night to part of the city wall, not near a city gate, and tied a large strong basket to a rope. Paul got inside the basket and they let him down to the ground. He was now outside the city and was able to flee from those who were looking to kill him (Acts 9:23-25).

Paul Goes To Jerusalem

Paul had decided it was a good time to go to Jerusalem and visit with a few of the apostles there (Acts 9:26 and Gal.1:18).

This was the first time Paul had been to Jerusalem since his conversion, and the disciples there were still not very sure of him, they still had doubts that he really was a changed man from his old zealous persecuting days. They just had trouble believing he really was a disciple of Jesus. They had only heard certain things about him, but had little personal knowledge that those things were as people had reported. They thought they better play it safe, better be safe than sorry as the saying goes.

But Barnabas, a disciple and a man God was using in a mighty way for His work, was confident that Paul was a true convert and that God had indeed called and chosen him for His work. Maybe the Holy Spirit laid it plainly on Barnabas' mind that this was so. Barnabas took Paul in, and then brought him before the apostles, declaring to them that Paul had indeed seen Jesus and had spoken to Him, as well as how Paul had preached very boldly at Damascus for a number of years, in the name of Jesus. The apostles on hearing from Barnabas, knew that God was speaking to them. Paul was accepted by them. He never visited for any length of time in a private way with any of them but Peter (he stayed with Peter for 15 days) and James, as we saw Paul tells us in Galatians, but he was among the general fellowship of the disciples at Jerusalem (Acts 9:26-28).

Paul Is Sent To Tarsus

While Paul was at Jerusalem he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed with the unbelieving Grecians, Jewish people who had a Greek upbringing and culture. So strong was Paul's words and authority in the Scriptures that once more his life was in danger. This time the Grecian Jews were planning how to kill him, and when this news got back to the brethren, they decided to send a few disciples with him and take him down to Caesarea. From there Paul was sent to Tarsus. He himself tells us in Galatians chapter two, that he did not visit Jerusalem again for fourteen years.

Whatever all the reasons may have been, which we are not told, except that Paul was no longer there with his very bold preaching and debating (as he was now in Tarsus), the churches had rest throughout Judea and Galilee and Samaria. There was relative peace among the churches of God in those regions. It was a time

conducive to and the multiplying of, edification, to walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:29-31).

Now We Focus On Peter Again

We have been given the basic background on the conversion of Paul, and his early years in the Church of God. It was then a time for Peter to be used by the Lord in a special way once more, as the work of God was to go forth to others, and as we shall see in the next chapter, to go forth to those who were not of Jewish or Israelite stock or birth. Up to this time the disciples had not really thought about moving in a large way to preaching to the Gentiles, except as some Gentiles came into the synagogues to worship on the Sabbath. The disciples were still basically of the old mind-set, that God's word and truths were mainly for the Jews, and only for the Gentiles as the Gentiles would kind of walk by it on the way to the synagogue. So only Gentiles of a "Jewish religious thought" would be effected by the Gospel of Jesus. The apostles and disciples had not yet come to realize the Gospel should go out to the Gentiles in an organized, deliberate manner. That was all too soon change. But first we are told about two great miracles Peter performed.

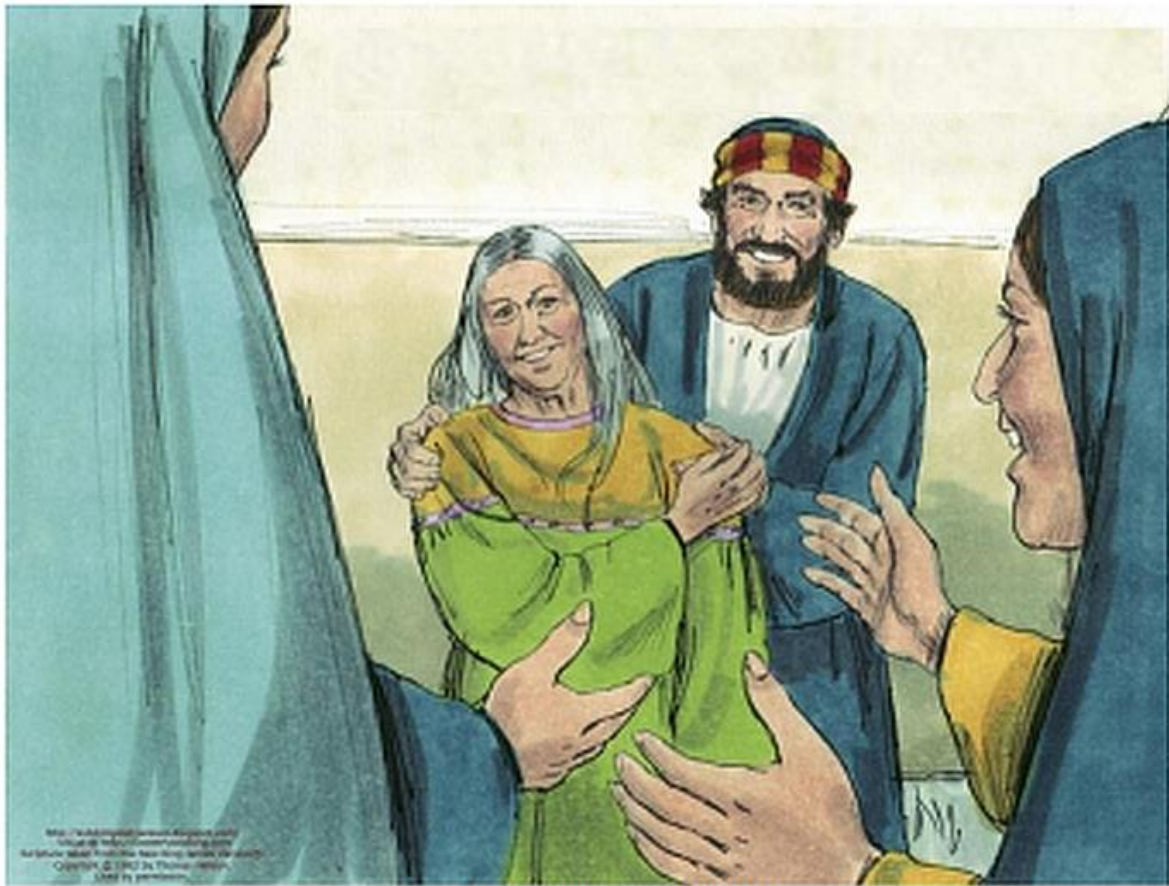
Peter Again Perform Great Miracles

Peter was out on a visitation of many of the towns and cities where the saints of God were living and he came to those who dwelt in Lydda (about 30 miles north-west of Jerusalem). There he found a man named Aeneas, who was bed-ridden with palsy (or a type of paralyzation). Peter said to him, "Jesus Christ makes you wholly healed; arise and make your bed." And immediately he did what Peter told him to do. And all those who dwelt in Lydda and Saron (another nearby town) saw the man that had been paralyzed, and who was now healed, and they turned to the Lord.

At the town of Joppa, about 20 miles west from Lydda. There was in that town a disciple named Tabitha, and she was always doing good works for people as well as donating whatever she could so others could be helped. She became sick and died. She was laid to rest in an upper room. The other disciples at Joppa heard that Peter was in Lydda, and sent two men to ask him to come to Joppa without delay. Peter was very willing to do as they asked. Arriving in Joppa,

Peter was brought into the room where Tabitha lay sleeping in death. The widows who were there weeping with sorrow over Tabitha, showed Peter all the lovely coats and garments Tabitha had made when she was alive. She had probably given those widows many coats and garments. Peter smiled but asked them to leave the room, which they did. Then he kneeled down and prayed. After saying his pray he turned to dead Tabitha and said, "Tabitha, rise up!" And she opened her eyes; and when she saw Peter, she sat up. Peter gave her his hand and helped her to stand up, and when he called for the saints and widows to come into the room, he presented her alive to them.

Soon the whole town of Joppa came to know what miracle Peter had done through Jesus' name, and many became believers in the Lord. Peter stayed on in Joppa we are told for many days, with a man called Simon, who was a tanner of skins by trade. It is not recorded for us but we can be pretty well sure that Peter would have done much teaching and preaching about Jesus and no doubt performed other miracles of healing (Acts 9:32-43).



Dorcas is healed through Peter

In the next chapter we shall see how God reveals to Peter that the Gospel is to go out to the Gentile world as much as to the Jews.

CHAPTER 8

THE GOSPEL GOES TO THE GENTILES

Acts 10

There was a man in the town of Caesarea (about 40 miles north of Joppa on the north-west coast of Palestine) by the name of Cornelius. He was in the Roman army, in the centurion band called "the Italian band." He was a religious man, a person that had a respectful fear towards God, and so he taught all his household to be like him. He gave much material gifts to the poor and was a man always praying to God.

About the ninth hour of the day or around 3 p.m. in our reckoning, he had a vision in which an angel of God came to him and said, "Cornelius." And Cornelius was at first terrified, but responded with, "Yes, what is it master?" The angel continued, "Your prayers and all your good deeds have come up before God in heaven. Now send men to Joppa, and ask for one named Simon, surnamed Peter. He stays with a Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell you what you are to do."

The angel departed and Cornelius then called for two of his household servants, and a devout religious soldier that was at his service all the time. He told them what his vision had been all about, and then sent them to Joppa (Acts 10:1-8).

Peter's Vision

As the servants of Cornelius were on their way the next day after the vision had come to their master, and they were close to the town of Joppa, it was about the sixth hour or 12 noon, and Peter went up on top of the roof of the house (the roofs were flat topped in those days) to pray. He got hungry and was thinking about having a meal, when he became sleepy and went into a visionary trance.

He saw heaven open, and as it was a great sheet tied at the corners and let down to the earth. Inside the sheet was all kinds of four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, creeping things of all sorts, and many different fowls of the air. A voice came to him saying, "Rise, Peter, kill, and eat." Peter was quick to reply, "Not so Lord, for I have never eaten anything that is defiled or unclean."

We can gather from Peter's reply that all on the sheet were creatures that under the Old Covenant would have been classified as "unclean" and not to be eaten as food by any Israelite.

We can also note from Peter's answer to the command to eat, that he had not, from the start of the New Covenant on that famous Pentecost day of Acts 2, broken the clean and unclean food laws of the Old Covenant. Obviously Peter did not automatically believe that the clean and unclean food laws were "done away with" under the New Testament.

The voice again spoke to him, "What God has cleansed, don't call common or unclean."

The whole vision was repeated three times, and then the sheet went back up to heaven (Acts 10:9-16).

Verse 17 says, "And while Peter DOUBTED in himself what this vision should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood at the gate."

It is very obvious that Peter did NOT automatically believe this vision of unclean beasts being called "clean" by God, meant that the food laws of the Old Covenant were now "abolished" and that he could eat whatever took his fancy. Peter was doubting what the vision meant. While meditating on it all as to what the Lord was trying to relate to him, the men from Cornelius were standing at the gate. They called out and asked if Simon, surnamed Peter, was lodging there.



Peter has a vision about unclean animals

Peter was still thinking about the vision when the Holy Spirit said to him, "Look, three men are seeking you. Arise and go down, and go with them, do not doubt, for I have sent them to find you."

Peter went down and walking up to the men sent from Cornelius, and said to them, "Yes, I am the one whom you are looking for. What is the reason that you have come to find me?"

And they said, "Cornelius, the centurion, a just man, one that has deep respect for God, and a man of good report among all the nations of the Jews, was told by an angel from God to send for you here in Joppa and in this house, and to have you come and speak words to him" (Acts 10:17-22).

Peter told the men to come on into the house and lodge overnight. On the following day Peter went with the men and so did certain other brethren from Joppa. They all travelled to Caesarea. And the day after arriving at Caesarea, Cornelius was anxiously waiting for Peter, and in eager anticipation he had called many of his family members and close friends to be with him when Peter arrived. When Peter came in Cornelius fell to his knees as if worshipping more than just a man. But Peter putting out his hand to have him rise up, said, "Please stand up for I am just a man like yourself." Peter was busy talking to Cornelius as he entered his house, and was somewhat surprised to see a large gathering of people had come together to greet him. Then he said to them all, "I'm sure you all know that in Jewish law and traditions it is unlawful for a man that is a Jew to socialize with others of a different nation; but God has already shown me that I should call no man, common or unclean. I therefore came without a second thought as soon as the messenger came for me. But I am still unsure for what purpose it is that you have called for me. Please explain it to me."

We see here the explanation of the sheet let down from heaven with all the unclean creatures on it. Peter had wondered, for he did not automatically think it was to show him that the clean and unclean food laws of the Old Covenant had been abolished. Now, he knew the exact meaning of the vision and the unclean beast. It was to show him that Jews should throw away their man-made idea and tradition that it was improper to socialize with non-Jews. The Jews over the centuries had misapplied some verses in the Old Testament that told Israel to abstain from the things of the pagan nations around them, to separate themselves from those nations. Of course Israel would be its own nation with its own land, but there are many verses in the old Scriptures that said they should allow strangers to be a part of their nation, and if those strangers wanted to accept their religious faith, then they would be fully adopted into the nation. There was to be one law for both the Israelite and strangers or non-Israelite among them (see Ex.12:49).

The Jews under the leadership of the self-righteous Pharisees, had invented a law that no Jew should eat with or socialize with, anyone that was not an Israelite. Remember how we have seen that during those first years of the New Testament Church of God, the preaching of the Gospel went to the Jews only, and of course to Gentiles that had accepted the Jewish faith, for they would also be in the Sabbath synagogue congregations. But no thought or effort was made to deliberately go to the Gentiles with the Gospel. Now the time had come for all that to change.

Back to Peter asking all in Cornelius' house the reason why they had wanted him to come to them.

It was fitting that Cornelius should answer his inquiry. "Four days ago I was fasting in my house and at the ninth hour I prayed, and a man like figure stood before me in shining clothing, and said to me, 'Cornelius, your prayer is heard and all the good deeds you have done, is remembered in the sight of God. Send to Joppa and call Simon, surnamed Peter, who is lodging in the house of one called Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea. When he comes to you he will speak to you great truths.' Immediately I sent for you, and you willfully and quickly came. Now we are all gathered here to hear from you the words that God has commanded you to speak and give to us."

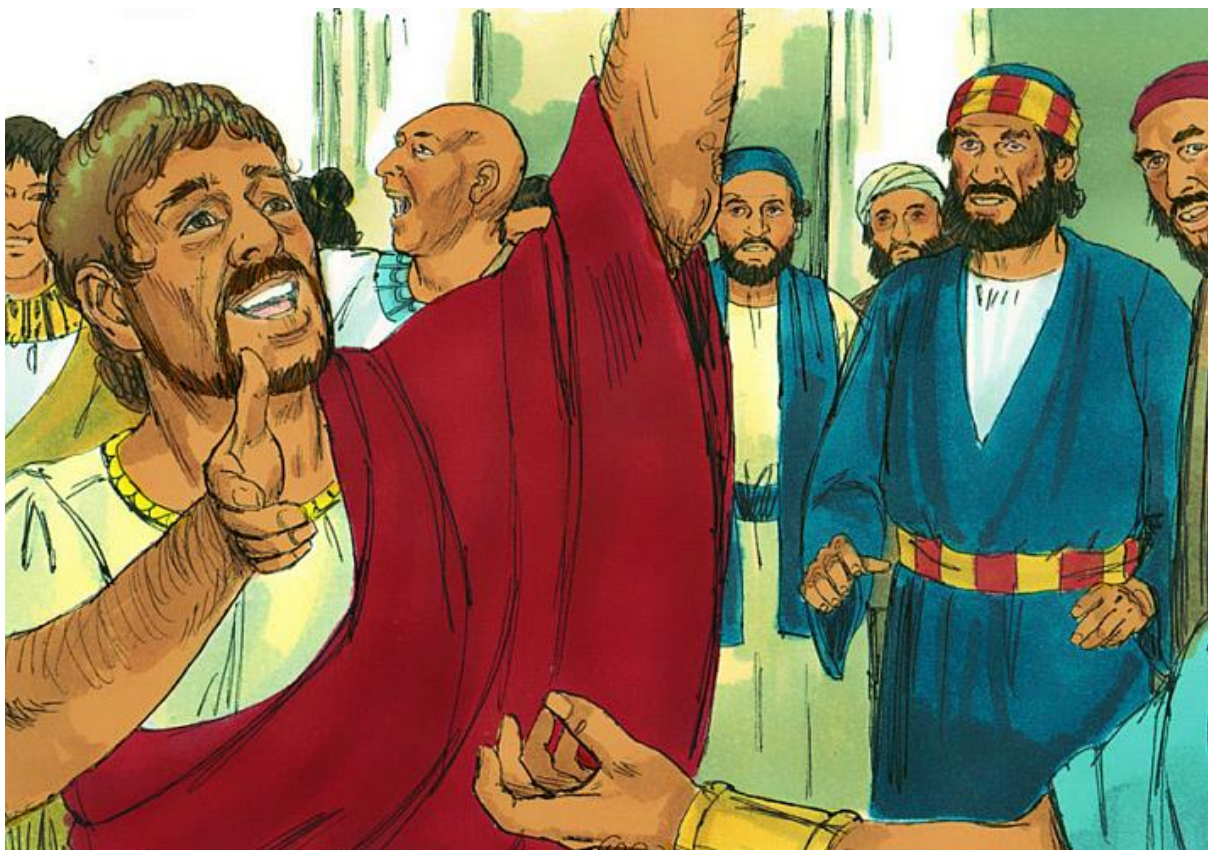
Guided by and filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter said:

"Well I know now that God is not a respecter of persons. But in EVERY nation those that fearfully respect Him and work righteousness, is acceptable to Him. The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all), that word, you know, which was first proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee, after the ministry and baptism of John.

"God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the Devil, for God was mightily with Him. And we apostles are witnesses of all the things which He did, both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom some there slew and hanged on a tree.

"This same man God raised up from the dead the third day, and was shown openly to us. He was not shown to all people, but unto witnesses chosen beforehand by God, we apostles are part of those chosen, and we did both eat and drink with Him after He rose from the dead. And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that He is the one who was ordained and appointed by God to be the judge of the living and the dead. And to Him all the prophets also give witness, that through His name, whosoever believes in Him shall receive remission (forgiveness) of sins."

As Peter was still speaking the last words, the Holy Spirit came upon all that were listening. Those of the circumcision who had come with Peter, which believed, the Jewish brethren who had accompanied Peter from Joppa, were astonished, for they beheld the gift of Holy Spirit coming upon Gentiles. And they heard those Gentiles speaking in different languages, and magnifying God (Acts 10:23-46).



The Holy Spirit and the gift of tongues suddenly came upon Cornelius and the other gentiles

This is an example of the Holy Spirit being given to some BEFORE they were baptized in Jesus' name. Yes, God can (He is in charge at all and any time) if He so desires for whatever reason (here it was to show Jews that the Gentiles were part of the people that God wanted as His children) give the gift of the Holy Spirit to some before water baptism. But as a general rule of thumb, it is as Peter instructed in Acts 2:38, baptism comes first and then the gift of the Spirit is given, as we have seen, with prayer and the laying on of hands. Yet, on special occasions, for special reasons, sometimes not known by us, God gives His Spirit before baptism.

Should people who receive God's Spirit before baptism, still be baptized? Well Peter gives us the clear answer, for after seeing this pouring of the Spirit upon Gentiles, he went on to say, "Can any man say we are to deny water, that these also should not be baptized which have received the Holy Spirit, like we received it?"

And Luke finished this section with these words, "And he (Peter) commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they earnestly asked Peter to stay for certain days with them" (Acts 10:47-48).

We must also note from this passage of Scripture that there is not one word to indicate that Cornelius or any there in the house with him were proselytes to the Jewish religion or that any of them had been circumcised. It is simply recorded that Cornelius was a devout man, one who prayed always, and a man who did good deeds towards others. All of this would have made it even more shocking for the Jewish brethren who had accompanied Peter from Joppa to see the Holy Spirit poured out on the Gentiles here in Caesarea.

Acts 11

Peter Explains His Mission To Caesarea To Those In Jerusalem

It did not take very long for the word to spread back to the apostles and brethren in Jerusalem that the Gentiles had received the word of God and the Holy Spirit, without them having to be circumcised.

Those believers in Jerusalem that thought and taught that it was still imperative for men to be circumcised to be saved and part of the children of God, were soon questioning Peter about the matter when he arrived back in Jerusalem. It is vital for us here to remember the importance of the rite of circumcision for the Jews.

They had had about 2,000 years history of practicing the rite. And it was a covenant given by God Himself to their great father Abraham. Even under Moses no one could partake of the Passover service unless he was circumcised (see Exodus 12). So this physical rite and under the Old Covenant, law of God, was a huge part of Jewish life, and had been for generations.

We need note also that up to this time in the Church of God, no angel had been sent to meet with all the apostles and tell them that circumcision was no longer necessary under the New Covenant. It was not until this happening with Peter in Cornelius' house that the Spirit of God had been poured out on uncircumcised Gentiles. So it would have been quite in line for those who still believed circumcision was needed to be in covenant with God, to question Peter over the matter.

It was also brought up to Peter that he socialized with uncircumcised people, which we have seen the Jews in their traditional upbringing were taught not to do so. Peter carefully went over all that had happened with him and with Cornelius, including the sheet that came down from heaven with all manner of unclean beasts on it, and how he was commanded to eat, but he did not, how it was done three times, then was removed back to heaven. Then how three men had come from Cornelius in Caesarea, and how the Spirit bade him return to that city with them.

He told them how six brethren from Joppa accompanied him to Cornelius' house. How Cornelius had had a vision to send for himself, and was told that he would say words to him and his whole household of relatives and friends, whereby they could be saved.

Peter told them that as he was yet speaking those words the Holy Spirit came on them as it had in somewhat like manner as they had received on the feast day of Pentecost some years back. He told them that it was at this time he remembered the words of Jesus, "John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit" which is another way of saying, you will be plunged into the power and nature of the Holy Spirit.

Peter finished his explanation of the events by saying, "In so much then that God gave them the gift that He gave us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who on earth was I that I should question the workings of God."

When they heard all this from Peter's mouth, they could say nothing. All they could do was glorify God by saying, "Then has God also granted to the Gentiles repentance unto life" (Acts 11:1-18).

Barnabas Goes To Tarsus To Find Paul

Meanwhile back at the ranch as the saying goes, Paul was living in the town of Tarsus. This was the capital of Cilicia, and the birthplace of Paul, and as we have seen, apart from about three years in Damascus, and a brief visit to Jerusalem, Paul was there preaching and teaching the Gospel, up to this time, when we shall now see that the apostle Barnabas goes looking for him.

The city Tarsus was straight north of Jerusalem, but in Asia Minor, or what is today Turkey. As you can see on a Bible map. you go straight up the sea coast of Palestine, and a little around the coast of the sea, and still on the sea is Tarsus. It is about 400 miles from Jerusalem.

Tarsus was situated in a wide and fertile plain on the banks of the Cydnus river, which flowed through it. The town was founded about 850 B.C. when the Assyrians entered Cilicia. It was renowned as a place of education under the early Roman emperors.

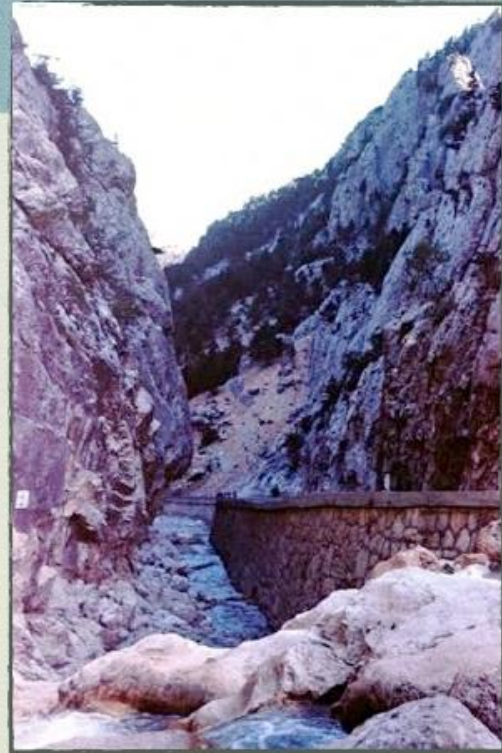
In fact Strabo compares it in this respect to Athens and Alexandria. That fact would explain to some degree the high education Paul had, as well as the fact that he tells us in his writings that he was a student of the famous Jewish theologian Gamaliel. It was a city also of much commerce. Both land and sea highways made Tarsus a famed ancient emporium.

The famous Cilician Gates, one of antiquity's most famous mountain passes, is not far distant, and access by water to the Mediterranean made Tarsus a famous trading center (information taken from "The New Unger's Bible Dictionary" - Moody Bible Institute, 1988).

Cilician Gates



Strategic passage
through the Taurus
mountain range



Here in chapter 11:19 we have seen that the Gospel which the scattered disciples preached after the persecution that arose after Stephen's death, was only to the Jewish people. The Gospel had gone to Phenice, and Cyprus, and to Antioch. Some from Cyrene and Cyprus came to Antioch and spoke to the Greek Jews about the Lord Jesus. And God was with them for a great number believed and accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior and Messiah. All this was noted by the members of the Church of God in Jerusalem, and they determined to send forth Barnabas as far as Antioch. Antioch was a little further south of Tarsus, about 50 miles away, but still on the sea coast (see the maps in the back of most Bibles).

When Barnabas arrived in Antioch he was happy to see the grace of God that had been in operation there. He exhorted the brethren to remain faithful to the Lord. Barnabas we are told was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith, and through his teaching many were added to the Lord's family.

But Barnabas, remembered the zealous Paul. He had not seen him for some time now and being only about 50 miles away from Tarsus and where Paul was living, he decided he wanted to have Paul with him in Antioch, for it seemed God had many He wanted in that city to come to Him through Jesus the Christ. Barnabas set off for Tarsus and did find Paul, and urged him to join up with him as a team and go back to Antioch to teach and preach the Gospel there. Paul did do so.

Both Barnabas and Paul stayed in Antioch about a full year with the church there, and through their teaching many were taught about Jesus. It is here that Luke tells us that the followers of Christ were first called Christians. "And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch."

It was during the stay of Barnabas and Paul in Antioch that prophets from Jerusalem came to visit. One of them named Agabus was inspired by the Spirit to tell them that a great drought would come upon all the known world, a general very hard time for farmers throughout the Roman Empire. It did indeed come to pass as he foretold, in the time of Claudius Caesar. This was in the early 40s A.D.

It would seem that Judea had a greater drought than some of the other areas of that part of the world, for the brethren in Antioch determined, as each had the ability to give, that they would send some goods to help relieve the poor and hungry brethren in Judea. They would send these material goods by the overseeing hands of Barnabas and Paul (Acts 11:19-30).

We are not told much, actually not really anything about this visit of Barnabas and Paul to Judea in the early 40s of the first century A.D. We are given information about James, the brother of John, and an event concerning Peter, and how the then Herod died. All this is in the next chapter of Acts. All these events we shall see in chapter twelve, took place while Barnabas and Paul were visiting in Jerusalem, but all that is said of them, is that they returned to Antioch after they accomplished what they had been sent to do, and on their return they took with them John, whose surname was Mark (Acts 12:25).

CHAPTER 9

PETER'S MIRACULOUS DELIVERANCE AND PAUL'S STARTS HIS FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY

Acts 12

It was around this same time of the great drought upon the land of Judea especially, that the then Herod decided to vex the Church of God. It was the Feast of the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, what is March or April on our calendar. The Romans were always very touchy and somewhat high-strung at this time, because so many uprisings had taken place by the Jews at this spring Feast time.

We are not given the details as to the WHY, but Herod took James the brother of John the apostle and had him killed by the sword. He saw that this pleased the Jews who did not like this "new Jewish faith" that had sprung up among them. And so he proceeded to take the apostle Peter. He had him brought in and thrown into prison. Herod thought that after the days of the Passover and Unleavened Bread was over, he would bring Peter out and present him to the Jews and would then see what they wanted to do with him, maybe he thought they would want him crucified as they did with Jesus.

The word "Easter" in the old KJV was a blatant mistranslation from the Greek. The Greek word used here is Pascha, which means Passover.

Peter was in prison but the Church of God people prayed for him, prayed without ceasing (Acts 12:1-5).

Herod was going to bring forth Peter from prison, but the night before a great miracle took place. Peter was bound by two chains between two guards, and the door keeper of the prison was at the door guarding as usual. Then a mighty angel from God came and shone brightly in the prison. The angel shook Peter awake and said to him, "Arise, get up quickly." The chains binding Peter's hands fell to the ground. The angel said further, "Gird up your clothes and put your sandals on. Put your tunic on and come follow me."

Peter obeyed and went with the angel, but he was so dazed and still somewhat sleepy that he thought all that was happening was a kind of dream. They passed the first enclosure and then the second enclosure of the prison and finally came to the prison's courtyard gate, that led out into the city. The gate just opened up as if magically all by itself. They went out and passed on through one street, and then the angel just disappeared from Peter's view.



An angel comes to free Peter from prison

He finally was fully awake enough to realize it was not all just a dream, but it was indeed very real what had all taken place, and he knew then that God had sent an angel to deliver him from Herod and from what the Jews may have wanted to do to him.

Peter moved on to the house of Mary, the mother of John, whose surname was Mark, and many of the brethren were gathered at her house; they were there praying together for Peter. He knocked at the gate, and a woman by the name of Rhoda came to answer his knocking. She heard Peter's voice and was so overjoyed she forgot to open the gate and let him in. She ran off to tell the others that Peter was at the gate. Well, the brethren did not want to believe her, and thought she was a little bit out of her mind, but she kept insisting what she said was true. They then said to her that she had maybe seen Peter's angel. We do have certain angels assigned to us at times, from God, to help us in various ways.

Peter continued knocking at the gate. Finally all the brethren coming close to the gate thought well someone is certainly out there knocking, so they opened up the door (which was obviously more like a door than a see-through gate). Wow....what a surprise for them, they were astonished to say the least, for there right in front of them stood Peter. They began to shout out with joy and praise. Peter motioned with his hands and had them quiet down, then related to them how God had delivered him from prison by an angel that He had sent. He then told them to go and tell James (probably James, the Lord Jesus' brother, the same James as we shall read about in Acts 15, when we get there) and other disciples and apostles.

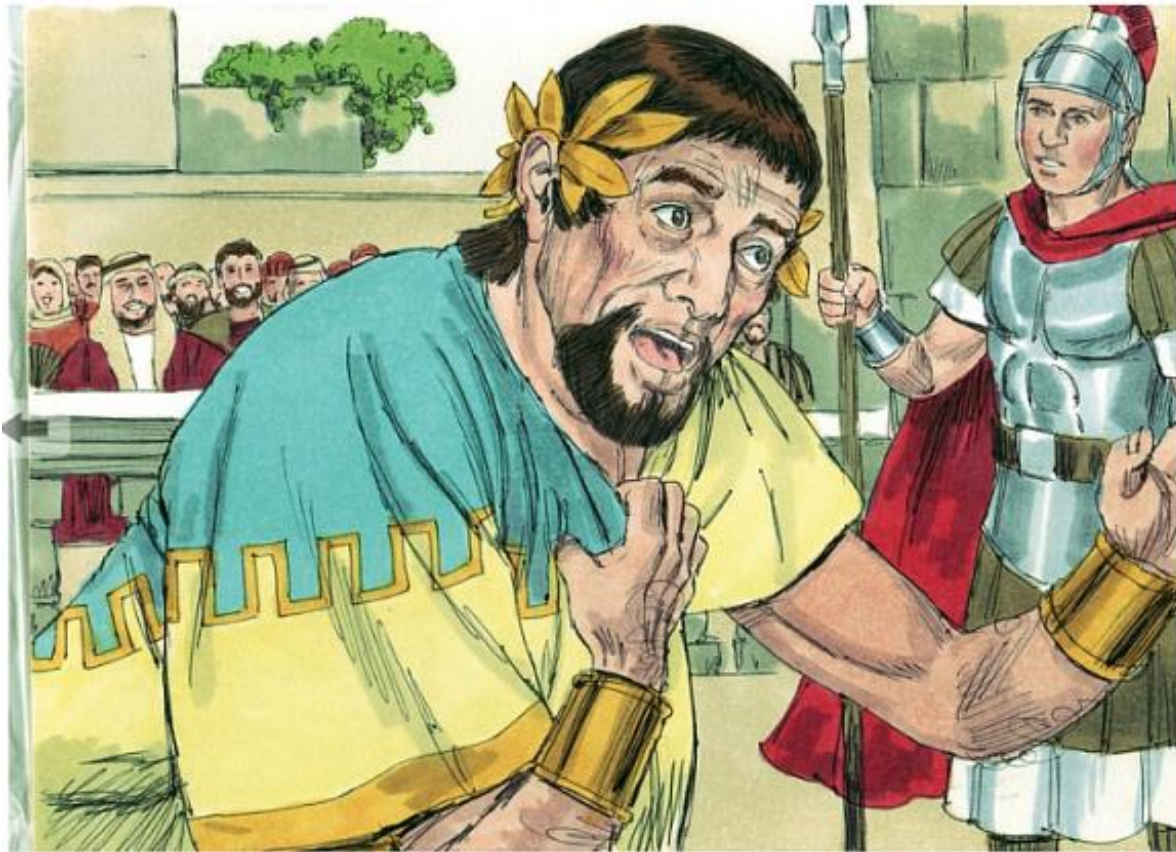
Peter then departed from them and went to another place, which we are not told where it was, or to whom he went (Acts 12:6-17).

Herod's Death

When it was daybreak the soldiers soon found that Peter was not in the prison. It naturally caused quite a commotion. Herod was told the situation. He was as mad as a wild bull. He called for the prison wardens, examined what they had to say about why Peter was not in the prison. He was not satisfied at all with what they had to say, and commanded that the wardens be put to death. Then he left Jerusalem and went to Caesarea for a while.

While there some political scheming went on between him and the officials at the cities of Tyre and Sidon (which are up the coast about 60 and 70 miles from Caesarea). The officials at those two cities had made friends with one of Herod's right hand men, called Blastus. They came to him all in a nice cosy fashion, desiring that peace would be between them and Herod, for Herod's country that he ruled over provided many physical things for the well-being and comfort of their country. Herod told them to come before him on a certain day and they willingly obeyed. When that day came Herod gave them what we might call a "Presidential speech." The people that heard this eloquent speech all shouted out, "Oh, this is the voice of god, not of a human man." Herod was thinking to himself that it was indeed so, just as they said, that he was some kind of a god. Immediately as he was agreeing with their shouts of adoration for him, an angel of the Lord smote him. We are told that he was not giving the true God glory, but obviously taking it all for himself.

He did not die instantly, but he was smitten with some kind of sickness that worms were eating away at him, and then he finally died. It must have been a terrible death, maybe slow and agonizing (Acts 12:18-23).



Herod Agrippa I was the grandson of Herod the Great (through Herod's son Aristobulus). He successfully made a claim to rule Judea in 41 AD which had been ruled by Roman Prefects such as Pontius Pilate after Herod the Great's son Archelaus was deposed in 6 AD.

Herod Agrippa was struck by God in 44 AD after the crowd chanted that he was a god and he took it unto himself rather than giving God such glory. Roman governors returned to ruling Judea after his death.

The word of God grew and multiplied more and more after Herod's death. Barnabas and Paul, who had been somewhere in the land of Judea handing out the goods they had brought with them from Antioch to help the draught stricken brethren of Judea, returned to Antioch and took with them John, whose surname was Mark. They must have thought he would be a good servant for their work in the ministry in Antioch (Acts 12:24-25).

As we look back on what we have just seen happen in Acts 12, we must wonder why one man is killed for his faith in God and another is delivered from what probably would have been death, if the unbelieving Jews had had their way. There is no specific answer to our question. You may remember in the Gospels where Jesus told Peter that he would one day be led away to a place he did not want to go, which was telling him he would die by being led captive and executed. Peter turned to Jesus and said, "Well what about this man here, what will happen to him, how will he die?" This was the man John, one of the apostles, that Peter was looking at and asking

Jesus about. Jesus told Peter to never mind about what he would do or how his life would end. He told him what did it matter to Peter if this man were to live until Jesus returned again from heaven. Christ told Peter to mind his own business as we say, yes, literally to mind his own business of doing God's work, and not be concerned about how God would work with another man (John 21:15-25).

We find that history tells us Peter was taken captive and was executed for his faith eventually, while John the apostle lived to an old age and died as far as we know from natural causes of old age.

It is not possible to know all the ways and the reasons as to why God works this way with one person and another way with another person. Some things are hidden from us in this life time. We must all simply be concerned with OUR life with God and what we can do for Him, for as long as God gives us this physical life, be it long or short, be it a natural death for us or an execution death for our Christian faith.

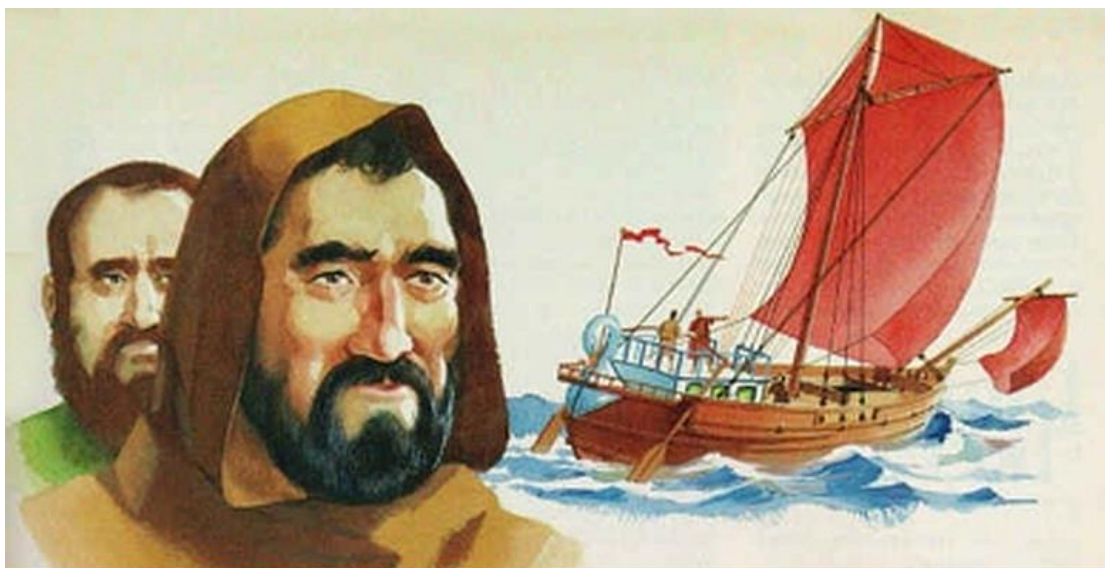
Acts 13

Barnabas And Paul Start Their First Missionary Journey

We now move back to Antioch where Barnabas and Paul had once more returned to.

Antioch in Syria, on the left bank of the Orontes, sixteen miles from the Mediterranean and three hundred miles from Jerusalem, between the Lebanon and Taurus mountain ranges. It was founded about 300 B.C.

The city was destroyed several times by earthquakes. It was luxurious. Its main street, four miles in length, was lined with magnificent mansions. It was highly cultural, but its social life was debase, sensual, and shocking. Jews formed a large portion of its population. It became the third city in the Roman Empire, having a population of 500,000. We have seen that it was there that the name "Christian" was applied to followers of Jesus. All three of Paul's missionary journeys began from Antioch (see a Bible Dictionary for this and more details on the city of Antioch in Syria).



Barnabas and Paul Sail Off on their First Missionary Journey

In the Church of God in Antioch there were prophets and teachers. The names of maybe the most prominent are given to us as: Barnabas, Simeon that was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen, and Paul.

As they served the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Spirit told them to separate Barnabas and Paul for a work that God had chosen them to do for Him. They all prayed and fasted more, then laid their hands on those two and sent them out.

The Holy Spirit led them to go to Seleucia and from there to Cyprus. At this point you may want to get out a good Bible map of this first missionary journey of Barnabas and Paul, to see exactly where they travelled to. John Mark was with them, and the first time we are told they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews was at the town of Salamis.

They then went through the isle unto Paphos, and came across a certain "witch" or "sorcerer" - a false prophet - a Jew by the name of Barjesus. This fellow often hung around with the high official of the country named Serius Paulus. He was a prudent man and called for Barnabas and Paul, desiring to hear what they had to say concerning the word of God. But Barjesus stood up against Barnabas and Paul wanting to turn Paulus away from the truth of God.

Then Paul filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, looked with piercing eyes upon this false prophet and said, "You, who are so full of all cunningness and wickedness, you who are a son of the Devil, you who are an enemy of all true righteousness, when is it that you will cease to pervert the ways of the Lord? And now, look, but you will not see, for the hand of the Lord is upon you. You shall not be able to see the sun, you will be blind for a season." And immediately a kind of mist and a darkness fell upon his eyes and he had to seek people to lead him about by the hand.

When Paulus saw what had happened to this false prophet he believed, for he was then astonished at the word and teachings of the Lord (Acts 13:1-12).

Paul Preaches In Antioch In Pisidia

Paul and company went from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia, and it was there that John Mark departed from them and returned to Jerusalem. We are not told as to why John Mark left them, only that he did. It was to Paul not a good reason for him to leave them, as we see from Acts 15:38. To Paul he abandoned the work of God.

Paul and company continued on from Perga to Antioch in Pisidia, a different Antioch than the one in Syria from whence they started their journey. They went into the synagogue on the weekly Sabbath day, and sat down. After the reading of the law and the prophets, the leaders of the synagogue said to all present, "You men and brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, then speak up and we shall listen." That was all that Paul needed to hear. He straightaway stood up and preached to them this little sermon:

"Men of Israel, and all you that respectfully fear God, please listen to me. The God of the people of Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people, when they lived as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with a mighty high hand brought them out of Egypt. He endured with them for about forty years in the wilderness. After destroying

seven nations of peoples in the land of Canaan, He divided the land up and gave a portion to each tribe. There were judges over Israel for about four-hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet. Then the people desired to have a king over them like other nations. He gave them Saul the son of Cis, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, who reigned about forty years. When God finally removed him as king, He gave them David to be their king. And God gave testimony of David saying, 'I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfill all my will.'



Paul preaches at Antioch (Turkey) that Jesus was the prophesied Messiah

“And from this man's descendants God has according to His promise, raised up to Israel a Savior, by the name of Jesus. But before He came, John fulfilled his calling by preaching baptism of repentance to all the peoples of Israel that came to him. While John was doing his work for God he said, 'Who do you think that I am? The Messiah? No, I am not. But there will come a man after me, whose sandals I'm not worthy to loosen.'

“Men and brethren, children from the line of Abraham, and all among you that respectfully fear God, it is to you, that this word of salvation is sent. For those who dwell at Jerusalem, and their leaders, because they did not wish to know Him the Messiah, nor the voice of the prophets which are read every Sabbath day, they have fulfilled the very prophecies contained in the prophets by condemning the Messiah Jesus. Yet they could find no cause of anything to deserve death, but they still wanted Pilate to kill Him. And when all that was written concerning this man, they took Him down from the tree and put Him in a tomb. But death could not hold Him, for God raised Him up from death, and He was seen alive for many days by those who followed Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who bear witness to this fact to all the

people. And we are here to declare to you the good news about the one great promise made to our fathers. God has fulfilled that very promise to us the children of our fathers, in that He has raised Jesus from death, just as it is written in the psalm: 'You are my Son, this day I have begotten you' (Ps.2:7).

“And as concerning the point that he raised Him to life from the dead, no more to ever experience physical corruption, He said it this way: 'I will give you the sure mercies of David' (Isa.55:3), and in another place in the psalms, 'You shall not allow your holy one to see decay and corruption' (Ps.16:10). David himself served the will of God in his generation, but fell asleep in death, was buried, and did see corruption. David was not writing about himself, but about Him that God raised from death, about him that did not see corruption of the physical body.

“Be it known unto you men and brethren that through the name of this man Jesus, is the preaching of the forgiveness of sins. And by Him all that believe can be justified or forgiven from all their sins, which you simply could not be from trying to observe the laws of Moses.

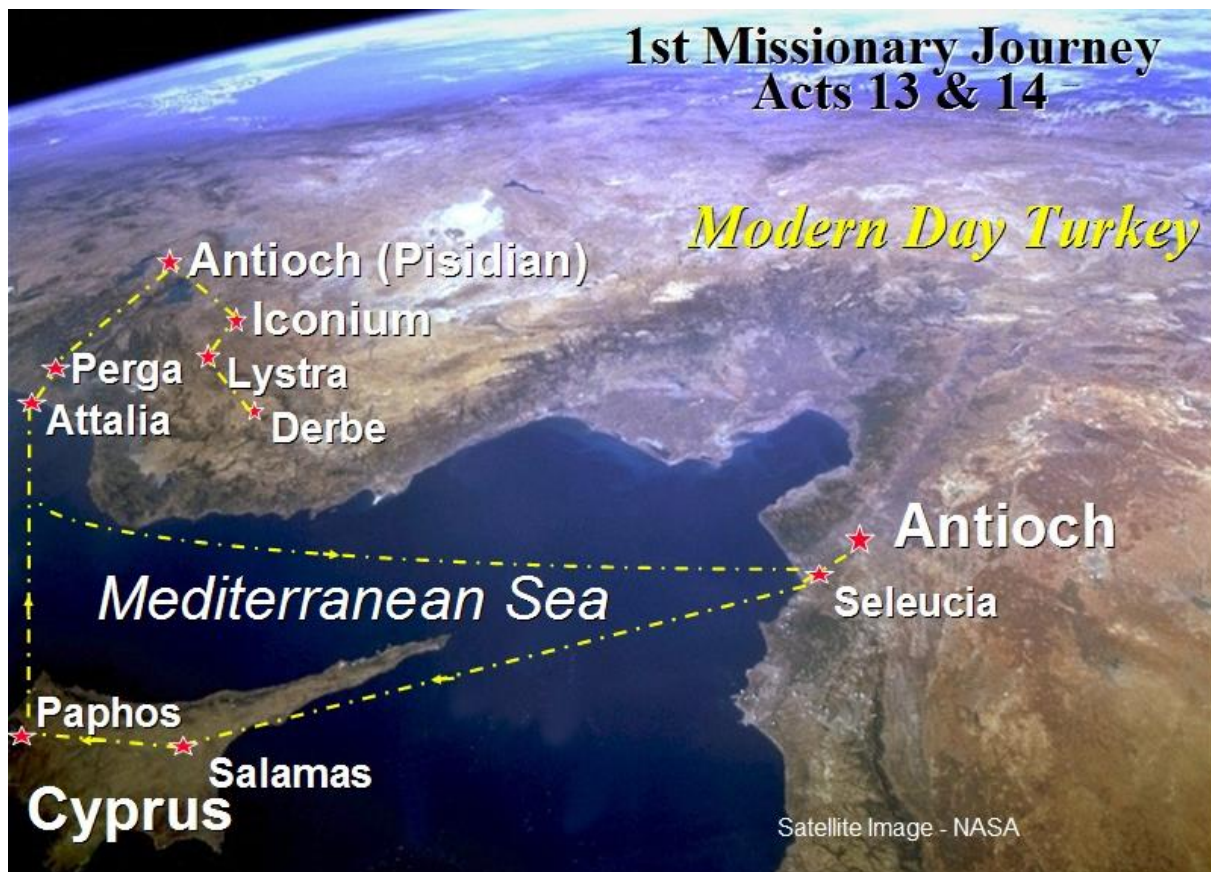
“Beware, take close heed to what I'm saying, lest it come upon you what is spoken in the prophets: 'Behold you that despise, and doubt, and continue on to perish because you will not believe. I will work a work in your days, a work that you may reject and not believe, even though I send men to tell you about it' (Habakkuk 1:5)”

Though in context the prophecy in Habakkuk was about the Chaldeans coming upon Judah to punish and destroy because of unrepentant sin - the type example was fitting for the truth of the Gospel and personally finding salvation from sin, being rejected by many, though preached to them. When the Jews had departed out of the synagogue, the Gentiles stayed behind and asked the two apostles to preach more of those words to them again the next Sabbath.

We can see here that the Gentiles did not ask Paul and Barnabas to preach to them on Sunday, as being the Lord's day. Of course they were new to the "new faith" being taught, so we can also see that Paul or Barnabas did not answer them by saying they could teach and preach to them "tomorrow" - it being the Lord's day or new Sabbath day under the New Covenant.

Here was the two apostles great opportunity to explain to them and to us today, that the fourth commandment of the great ten had been "changed" to "the first day of the week" or to what we call Sunday. If Sunday had become under the New Testament the new Lord's day, then Paul and Barnabas could have told them they could meet with them the very next day as they would be observing the first day of the week as Jesus' resurrection day and as the now New Covenant Sabbath day. But as we see, no such thought or idea or teaching like this came from either of them.

Outside the synagogue many of the Jews and those who had been converted to the Jewish faith, followed Paul and Barnabas to hear more about the Gospel. And after expounding more of the word of God to them, many did believe and the two apostles encouraged them to continue in the grace of God now given to them (Acts 13:13-43).



The Next Sabbath - Jewish Opposition

During the week word got around Antioch in Pisidia, about what had happened the Sabbath before in the synagogue, and nearly the whole city came out to hear the word of God as preached by Paul and Barnabas. The Gentiles were out by the droves, a multitude of them, hungry to hear more from those two preachers that had arrived among them.

But the Jews became filled with envy. They did not like what it was all perhaps leading to. The Jews did not have the same attitude of mind as the Gentiles were exhibiting. They started to speak against the things Paul and Barnabas were saying. They started to argue, contradict, and ended up even blaspheming. It was a mind-set that was as if they did not believe in God or His inspired word. All this just made Paul and Barnabas get stronger and stronger in preaching and teaching. Then they both came to a revelation, they said to the Jews, "It was right and proper that we first preach the word of God to you, but because you have thrown it to one side, thrown it away as far as the east is from the west, and have condemned yourself not worthy of everlasting life, well, behold, we shall go to the Gentiles. For we now see that God has called us for that commission, for it is written, 'I have sent you to be a light to the Gentiles, that you should proclaim salvation to the very ends of the earth'" (Isa. 42:6 and 49:6).

When the Gentiles heard these words from the two apostles they were exceedingly happy and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as were being called of God to eternal life, they believed. The word of God went forth throughout the whole region.

The Jews were some upset, upset as possibly as much as they could be without getting violent. Many of them went to other religious Jewish women, women of high status in the community, many men in high-ranking official governance of the city, and managed to get all those people to persecute in various ways the apostles Paul and Barnabas. It all led to having them expelled from the city.

The two apostles shook off the dust from off their feet as they left the city, as Jesus had told His disciples to do, if a town or city rejected them, and they moved on to Iconium.

The overall good done and fruits of preaching God's word was getting large results for the positive, and so the disciples were filled with joy and with more of the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:44-52).

CHAPTER 10

THE CIRCUMCISION QUESTION SETTLED

Acts 14

Paul and Barnabas were in Iconium, a town in Asia Minor or Turkey as it is called today, and they both went into the synagogue of the Jews and spoke so powerfully that a great multitude of the Jews and also of the gentile Greeks became believers in Jesus as the Messiah. But once more the unbelieving Jews stirred up a good percentage of the unbelieving Gentiles against the brethren. Yet Barnabas and Paul stayed there quite a time speaking boldly in the Lord, and Christ gave proof of His grace by granting wonderful signs and miracles to be performed by them.

In the process of time the people of the city were divided, part sided with the unbelieving Jews and part sided with the apostles. The unbelieving Jews and Gentiles together with many of their leaders decided they would take stronger action against the apostles and stone them one day when it was the right time. But the apostles became aware of their evil plan and fled from that city and went to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycoania, and they preached the Gospel in that whole area. This is all about 15 to 20 miles west of Tarsus, where Paul was living before Barnabas came from Antioch in Syria to bring him over to Antioch as we have already seen in an earlier chapter (Acts 14:1-7).

Paul Heals A Cripple

In Lystra there was a man who was crippled in the feet from birth, and who had never in his life walked. The man was looking at Paul as he preached and Paul detected that he had faith to be healed, and so, with a loud voice said to him, "Stand up on your feet!" The man stood and began walking and then leaping around, as if he had done so all his life. It was truly a remarkable miracle, for the man not only was healed in the feet but was given the ability of balance and walking and leaping without ever have to learn to do so. The people of the city in their particular language all began to shout at the top of their voices, "Oh, the gods, the gods, have come down to us in the likeness of men!" They named Barnabas with the name "Jupiter" and Paul they named "Mercurius" - two of their most revered gods. It will be of interest here to learn a little about these two famous gods of the Gentiles. I will quote from the Bible Commentary by Albert Barnes:

Jupiter was represented as the most powerful god of the ancients. He was represented as the son of Saturn and Ops.....the worship of Jupiter was almost universal.....His common appellation was, the father of gods and man. He was usually represented as sitting on a golden or an ivory throne, holding in one hand a thunderbolt, and in the other a sceptre of cypress. His power was supposed to extend over other gods; and everything was subservient to his will, except the fates. There is abundant proof that he was worshipped in the region of Lycoania, and throughout Asia Minor.....

Mercury, called by the Greeks 'Hermes' was a celebrated god of antiquity....He was the messenger of the gods, and of Jupiter in particular; he was the patron of travellers and shepherds; he conducted the souls of the dead into the infernal regions; and he PRESIDED OVER ORATORS, AND DECLAIMERS, and merchants....He was regarded as the god of ELOQUENCE; and as light rapid and quick in his movements. The conjecture of Chrysostom

is, that Barnabas was a large athletic man, and was hence taken for Jupiter; and Paul was small in his person, and was hence supposed to be Mercury. BECAUSE HE WAS CHIEF SPEAKER. The office of Mercury was to deliver the message of the gods; and as Paul only had been discoursing, he was supposed to be Mercury" (emphasis Barnes).

The head priest of Jupiter for the city ordered oxen and all the trappings for sacrifice be brought to the city gate, and he was ready to offer sacrifice with the people to Paul and Barnabas.

When the apostles heard this, they were abhorrent and tore their outer garments, which was a sign and custom back then of humiliation. They ran among the people crying out,

"Sirs, people, why are you doing these things? We are just men like yourselves, with human passions as you have. We are teaching that you turn from vain useless customs and practices and worship the true living God, the one who made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all that are in them. Who in times gone by allowed and permitted all nations to walk after their own ways and mind. But He was not without witness of His existence, for He did good to people, giving rain from heaven, and fruitful harvests, filling people's hearts with food and gladness."



The people of Lystra mistaken Paul and Barnabas for Greek gods.

Even with those words it was still very difficult to restrain the people from offering sacrifice to them, but they did manage to prevent them from doing so.

It was but a short time later when certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium came and with clever words and emotional tactics, they got the people so worked up against and in opposition to Paul and Barnabas, and especially Paul, for it would seem he did most of the preaching, that they started to stone Paul, and actually thought they had killed him. They pulled what seemed, his lifeless body, outside the city to rot in the sun. The other disciples were gathered around his body, also presuming he was dead, when he rose up on his legs and headed straight back into the city.

It was another miracle for sure, and it would seem the people of the city and those who had just stoned Paul, knew it was a miracle also, for they did not come anywhere near him to try harming him again. They probably thought if they did some lightning bolt would come down from heaven and strike them dead. Paul spent the

rest of the day and night back in the city and then with Barnabas departed the next day to go to Derbe.

There they preached the Gospel and taught many about the word of God and Jesus Christ, then with great faith in the power and protection of God they returned again to Lystra, to Iconium, and finally back to Antioch from where they started their missionary journey. They strengthened the lives of the new disciples they had made in those towns, encouraging them to endure in the faith, and teaching them that it is sometimes through much trials, troubles, and tribulations, that we must enter the Kingdom of God.

Life as a Christian is not always a bed of roses, sometimes along the way we have thorns and thistles we must contend with, some have more and some have less. No one knows what hardships we may encounter in our life as we walk God's way, unless God decides to tell you beforehand in a dream or send you an angel to tell you. For the vast majority of us, that does not happen. But we must expect that somewhere and at some time, we will have to face hardship, difficulties, problems. But Paul elsewhere in his writings told us that God would not try us above what we are able to bear, but will with the trial make a way of escape. We need to keep our faith in God that He will help us through all of the valleys that come along in life, then we can really enjoy the mountain peaks when we are riding high.

We are also told that Paul and Barnabas (the context of the verses is talking about those two apostles) appointed, or separated, or decided, to make spiritual elders (in the plural) in every Church of God they founded and established. They prayed, they fasted, and then commended those "elders" to the Lord. Jesus had said that we ought to pray to God that He would send out more laborers into the harvest, for the harvest is great.

Not all are called to be spiritual leaders and guides of the flock of God. There are many functions in the body of Christ, some are called by God to be apostles (ones sent forth as the Greek means), prophets (given insight into prophetic things yet to come to pass) evangelists (those acting like Paul and Barnabas, who have a gift to proclaim God's truths to groups of unbelievers), and teachers (pastors, overseers of the flock) (see Acts 20:17-31 and Eph.4:11-16 with Heb.13:7,17).

It is right and proper that men already in the functions that Paul and Barnabas were in should be able, with prayer and fasting, to separate and commend other men to God as "elders" in the Churches of God.

Notice the importance of the use of the plural, it is elderS, not elder. Every Church of God should if at all possible have elderS, for no one man should be sole spiritual guide of any one congregation. So also was Paul's instruction to Titus, that he should appoint elderS in every city as Paul had instructed him to do (Titus 1:5). And later Paul was inspired to lay down certain requirements for the function of being an elder, we find them in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.

Paul and Barnabas also went through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia. They preached the word in Perga and went down to Attalia, from there they sailed to Antioch in Syria, back to where they had been commended by the leaders of that congregation and by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to go on that missionary journey.

When they arrived back in Antioch they gathered all the members of the church together and told them all about what God had done through them, and how the door of faith was opened wide to the Gentiles. There both Paul and Barnabas stayed for quite some time with all the disciples of Antioch (Acts 14:8-28).

Acts 15

The Circumcision Debate Is Settled

Sometime later after Paul and Barnabas had been back in Antioch for a while, certain men from Judea came and started to teach the brethren there that "Except you be circumcised after the manner of Moses, you cannot be saved."

Paul and Barnabas never taught any such doctrine. We remember from an earlier chapter that Paul had told us in his writing to the Galatians, that he was taught personally by the revelation of Jesus. He knew from the start that physical circumcision was not required under the New Covenant for salvation, or in order to be saved.

There was quite a debate that ensued, between those who had come down from Judea teaching circumcision was needed to be saved and Paul and Barnabas who taught that it was not required to be saved. The whole congregation finally decided that Paul and Barnabas and certain other brethren, should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders of the Jerusalem church and get this issue decided one way or the other, once and for all.

On their way up to Jerusalem they went through Phenice and Samaria declaring the conversion of the Gentiles, and great joy was upon all the brethren.

When arriving in Jerusalem they were received by the church there, and by the apostles and the elders, and they told the Jerusalem church all the good things God had done through them and their teaching and preaching.

We need here to return to Paul's writing in the book of Galatians for he gives us some information not recorded in Acts chapter 15 by Luke.

Paul had not visited the Jerusalem congregation for 14 long years. This was now about 50 to 52 A.D. as most scholars believe. Not only Barnabas was with him but also Titus. He went up because God revealed or impressed him to do so. He told the church about the Gospel he preached, but he also at this time had PRIVATE meetings with "those of reputation" just to make sure he was teaching the same as they were teaching, and that his work then was not in vain.

He makes it clear that none of those in reputation compelled Titus to be circumcised. He tells us that in private conference with "those who seemed to be somewhat" that they added nothing to his teaching or theology we may say. But just the opposite, when they saw and knew that God was working with Paul's ministry to the uncircumcised, in as much as He was working with Peter's ministry to the circumcised, when James, Peter, and John "who seemed to be pillars" knew that God was working with Paul and Barnabas, they gave them the right hand of fellowship, and agreed that Paul and Barnabas should go to the uncircumcised and that they would concentrate on the circumcised. Paul said those leaders only wanted

to add one thing to their ministry, and that was to remember the poor, which Paul said he had already been told that and doing it. Yes, of course he had for he had been personally taught by Jesus (Gal.2:1-10).

So we see what went on with Paul and Barnabas in private meetings with those who were the main leaders of the church in Jerusalem. The circumcision question was ALREADY put to rest with them all. They ALL agreed that physical circumcision was NOT a requirement to be saved. Titus, who was with Paul, and who was not circumcised, was not required to be circumcised. The issue and question of physical circumcision was already answered by God to the apostles of God.

Now back to Acts 15:5. But there arose some within the sect of the Pharisees who were believers, members of the church in Jerusalem, they rose up and said, "It was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses."

Now what this was meaning was they taught everyone should obey all the law of Moses as they did under the Old Covenant, with all its rituals, sacrifices, and of course physical circumcision.

We must try to put ourselves into those times, to understand the picture. Physical circumcision had been a very important part of Jewish life for about 2,000 years, right from the days of Abraham. To now think it was no longer needed, was to some, like cutting off their right arm and right leg. It was so ingrained in their mental thoughts and physical life, they just could not envision life without that physical rite. Had not God given it to them as a sign and as a covenant? Had not God said that NO person could partake of the Passover meal service UNLESS they were circumcised? Yes, it was so, as under the Old Covenant. So some of the believers of the sect of the Pharisees just could not see salvation without physical circumcision. It was anathema to their minds. To them it was heresy to say physical circumcision was not required to be saved.

There was now only one way to resolve this question, and that was to bring the whole Jerusalem church together, with all the apostles, with Paul and Barnabas, and have an open debate on the matter. This is what we now read about in Acts 15 and verses 6 to 21.

The Circumcision Debate

The apostles and elders came together to consider the matter of physical circumcision for salvation. There was "much disputing" we are told. This was not a low key talk, but a heated and zealous debate. Peter stood up and said:

"You know brethren that a good while ago God made it known to us His favor that the Gentiles should hear the Gospel by my voice, and they believed it. And further, God knowing the hearts of people, gave them the Holy Spirit even as he had given to us, and this is a witness for us. He put no difference between us and them in the purification of the heart by faith. Now therefore why do we want to try God by putting a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor us were able to bear. But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they are saved."

When Peter was talking about a yoke laid upon them, he was talking a lot more than the physical act of circumcision. For that rite could hardly be a yoke that none could bear, as the people of Israel had lived very well under performing physical circumcision, after all its only the removal of some physical skin from an 8 day old baby boy, which thousands still practice to this very day. This was not the burden that none could bear.

The burden that none could bear, was to try and gain salvation, or the grace of God, by working at all the laws of Moses. It was by trying to earn salvation through law observance, and not through grace by faith. It was trying to live by laws, building up more good righteous deeds than bad ones, more good thoughts than bad thoughts, more good words spoken than bad words spoken. So the good outnumbered the bad and thinking God then was obliged somehow to have to give you salvation. Being saved that way would be you earning it. But salvation was NEVER to be achieved that way. God had always intended that salvation would be by His grace through faith in the sacrifice of His Son, for the sins of the whole world.

Anyone trying to gain salvation any other way was doomed to failure, would then truly have a yoke upon them which no one could bear. For it was just not possible to live a full lifetime in full harmony with the laws of Moses, with all the laws written in the books of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Number, Deuteronomy). And just one sin or infraction of law would mean you were guilty of sin and so under the sentence of death.

It's like you obeying all the traffic laws of your town for years but then you run a red light. All the correct law observance still cannot nullify the time you broke the law, you are still guilty and you are still under the penalty imposed on you for breaking that law. Even if you obey for another ten years all the traffic laws perfectly after that infraction of the one you broke, you still must pay the penalty for the one you broke.

So it is with the laws of God and the way to salvation. But the police chief sent his Son to pay for you the law/s you broke. The fine was paid by the Son. All you have to do is believe this, have faith, accept the Son as your savior from the penalty imposed, be sorry, repent, set your mind to want to continue as a way of life, the will and ways and laws of God, and you can be under His grace, and be saved.

No other way can work. Any other way you may want to set as your way, your theology ideas on how to be saved, that is NOT God's way, can only be a yoke of a burden that none can ever bear.

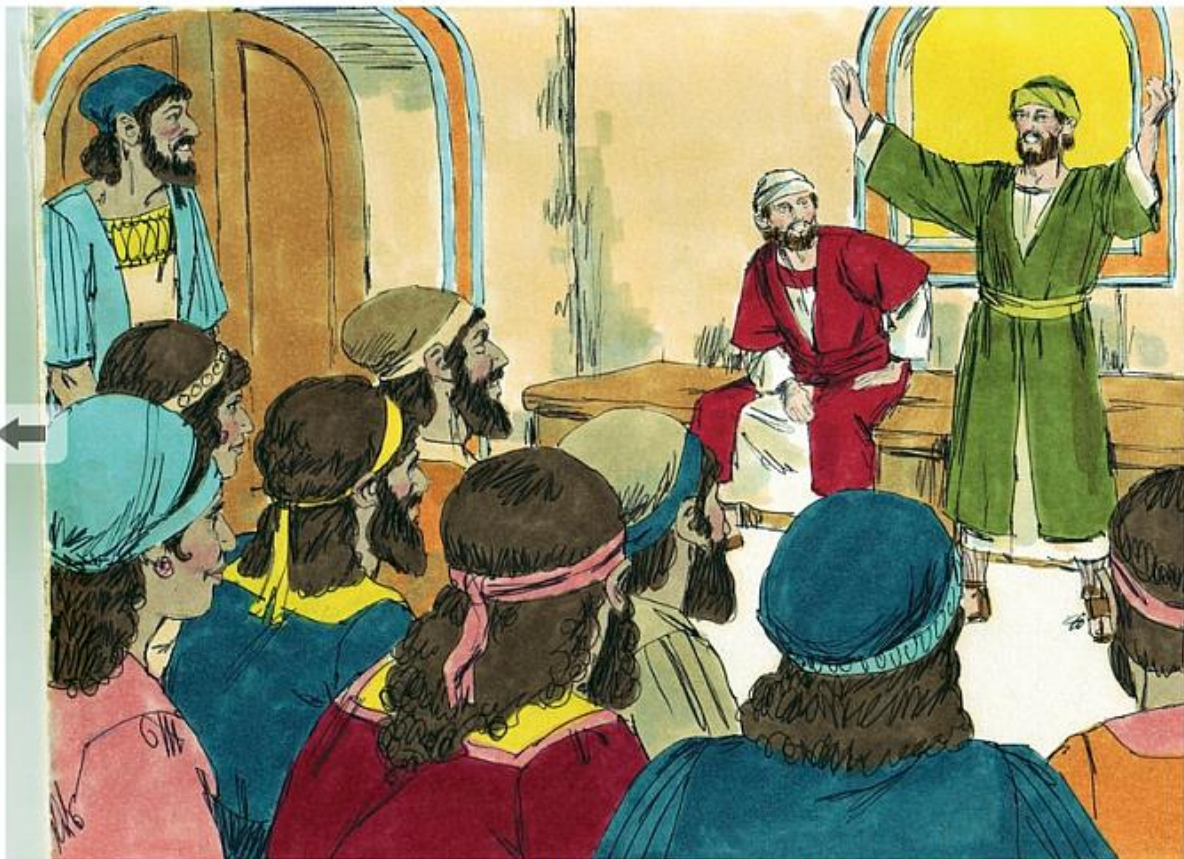
God had made a way of salvation. The apostles knew it. It had been really revealed to them from the time they spent with Jesus during His earthly ministry. Now, some many years later, comes this idea from some that you must be physically circumcised and still be under ALL the Old Covenant laws of Moses to be saved. Peter was setting the record straight that salvation could never be achieved this way.

Make no mistake, the New Covenant does not "blanket" do away with all laws of Moses. We are told very clearly that the New Covenant will put or write the laws of God into our hearts (see Hebrews 8) and faith does not do away with law but it established it (Rom. 3:31). So in living by "every word of God" as Jesus taught us that we should do (Matt. 4:4), we must let the whole Bible interpret for us how we go about that. Here we are seeing that physical circumcision is not required. The Old

Covenant law of going to one place or city, where God placed His name to observe His Festivals, is no longer applicable under the New Covenant (see John 4:21-24). No one today believes that women must stay away from "church" when she is in her monthly cycle, but under the Old Covenant she had to. Under the Old Covenant a woman had to stay away from "church" for a period of certain days after giving birth to a child. No one believes that law of Moses is applicable for Christians today.

This group from the sect of the Pharisees, within the Church of God, were teaching that all people still had to live by all these laws of Moses, and physical circumcision was of prime importance to them. Their theology to salvation was incorrect, and at this debate, the apostles were making it very clear to all present that it was an incorrect theology.

The multitude of the brethren were silent after Peter spoke. Then it was time for Barnabas and Paul to have their say. And they declared all the wonders and miracles that God had done through them among the Gentiles. Of course they would have given emphasis to the fact that God was doing all this without the Gentiles having to be circumcised.



James announces the decision made at the conference regarding circumcision in Acts 15

Then James stood up after Barnabas and Paul had finished speaking, and said:

"Men and brethren, listen to me. Peter has declared to you how God at first brought in the Gentiles, to call out from them a people for His name. And to this agrees the very prophets in the Scriptures that we have; as it is written, 'After this I will return, and will build up the tabernacle of David, which has seen corruption and lays in ruin; and I will build again the ruins of it, and set it all in correct order. So the relatively

small elect of men may find the way to the Lord, and all the Gentiles also, upon whom I will place my name. I the Lord have done all this' (Amos 9:11-12). Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world. Wherefore my judgment is this. That we do not trouble them, which are from among the Gentile nations who have turned to God. But that we write to them that they abstain from pollutions of idols, from sexual immorality, from animals strangled to death in killing them for food, and from the eating of blood. For Moses has from old times in every city those that teach his word, being always read in the synagogue every Sabbath day" (Acts 15:6-21).

A very important answer by James. He backed up what Peter and Barnabas and Paul had to say with the very word of God. It had been foretold by God Himself that His truths to worshipping Him and to salvation (tabernacle of David) would be ruined, would become incorrectly understood. But He would build it back, would restore it to correctness, and in so doing, He would also bring it to the Gentile nations. This, James was saying, is what God had already done over the preceding years. The true way to salvation had been clearly revealed to the apostles by God's word and by acting in certain ways to show the apostles that true way. And God had always from the beginning of His works determined salvation would be only attained this one way.

Now verses 20 and 21 have given some great problems to understand. Many have thought the Gentiles only have to follow these four laws, and everything else can go out the window. Rather silly is this reasoning, for surely the Gentiles are not free to kill and murder, or to take God's name in vain, or to bow before idols, while the Jews must obey those laws. And then notice that some of the four things mentioned are what you might call "physical" laws; i.e. things strangled to death and then eaten, was prohibited to the Jews by God, as one of the food laws under the Old Covenant, for the blood was to be drained, which meant killing the animal in such a way as to allow the blood to drain. This is obviously a physical food law. Yet James says Gentiles were then to obey it. Same can be said for "blood." James is obviously talking about the physical law of not eating blood, which God said the Israelites were not to do.

Yes, this can give some people problems in their thoughts, and with some it leads to believing many errors of New Testament theology, as well as out and out contradictions in their theology ideas.

Some astute Bible scholars have of course seen the strange ideas many have devised from these two verses, and have come to see the truth in the context of the whole New Testament.

James listed four things the Gentiles should be warned specifically about, so not to do or observe, because the Gentiles HAD GREAT TROUBLE WITH THEM! Or to put it another way the Gentile LIFE STYLE WAS FULL OF THOSE FOUR THINGS MENTIONED. The various pollutions to idols was numerous, superstitions, lucky-charms, fortune-telling, palm-reading, crystal-ball reading, trying to look to the heavenly stars to see your future, and many many more, was all over the heathen world.

Sexual immorality was everywhere in the pagan world, probably the pinnacle of that sin was in having Temple prostitutes. Often the pagan Temples employed hundreds of women whose occupation was to have sexual relations with the men who came to

worship in the Temples. Temple sex for them was part and parcel of their religious faith and practice.

The pagan health practices were often very debased and far from the physical health laws laid down by God to Israel through Moses. Eating and drinking of blood in various ways was common among the Gentiles. Much blood would be consumed by them in strangling animals to death and not draining the blood from them, as well as the literal drinking of cups of blood in their religious rites and ceremonies.

God had told Israel that LIFE was in the blood, and that they should not eat and drink blood. Today we are seeing the importance of not contaminating our cattle in the many ways that our nations have been doing (thinking it produces larger and quicker meat supply). But eventually it comes back on us in health problems (the "mad cow disease" is but one, but one of the most severe ones), for blood carries the life flow of the animal to all its tissues, and if the animal's blood is not drained fully, or if we drink cups of it in pagan religious rites, then we are finally going to reap bad health problems of one kind or another. With things like our "mad cow disease" we may even drain the blood from the animal correctly but its tissue meat is so polluted we still are affected by it, even to the point of death.

The Gentiles may have come over into the Christian church, but as many people know who have come out of deep and gross sins as a way of life that they perhaps lived for many years, it is not always easy to give up fully and completely those sins, be it mental, spiritual, or physical. How many have accepted Jesus as their Savior, only in time to return to the sins they came out of? Many a pastor will tell you that it can be many who just cannot fully and completely kill the old man with its lusts and passions. Sadly they will tell you of many that come to Jesus with good intentions and come to the "church" for a while, but in time often drift away and end up back in their old way of life and sins.

It was no different in the days of James and this Jerusalem debate. The Gentiles tended to have MAJOR problems with certain pollutions with old idols, with sexual immorality, with not killing animals in a way to drain the blood, and to even drinking blood in various forms, in their past life. Heathen peoples often have "blood" eating and drinking as part of their rites and worship. Like many other things, certain physical things, that God does not allow in our lives, can take a hold on us and be very difficult to break, just ask (not really, but as a figure of speech) some Christians who still have a problem in overcoming the smoking habit.

It is also just as obvious if we simply take it for what James said, that James did not believe the four things he mentioned were "done away with" under the New Covenant. Some of them are of the "moral" law and some of them are of the "physical" law of God. But all of them James still expected the Gentiles (as well as the Jews of course) to obey and to live by, living in NOT doing them.

They were four of the MOST PROMINENT problems for Gentiles to put away from their lives, so James felt it needful to specifically point them out to them. Other things they could find out in due time, for he then went on to say what he said in verse 21.

They could find the ways of God, living His way of life, as they attended Sabbath services in Jewish synagogues on the Sabbath, not Sunday you will note, but on the

Sabbath, the day that Jews observed in accordance to the fourth commandment of the great ten commandments. Moses, or the laws in the first five books of the Bible, were read every Sabbath, and the Gentiles could then "grow in grace and knowledge" as we are told to do under the New Covenant, by hearing what Moses wrote under the guiding hand of God. They could hear Moses every Sabbath day in the synagogues.

James was still upholding what Jesus said for us to do, that is, to live by every word of God.

The Decision Conveyed To The Church In Antioch

The apostles, elders, and the whole church there at Jerusalem decided to write a letter of the outline of the decision that was reached, to the Gentile brethren in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia. They also decided to send along a few other men with Paul and Barnabas to Antioch. The men chosen were men of leadership in the brethren at Jerusalem, and they were Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas. They would also verify what was written in the letter was true.

The letter basically gave the outline of what we have just studied as to what happened in the Jerusalem debate over the matter of physical circumcision. It upheld the fact that God had fully revealed for some time, that physical circumcision was not required in order to be saved.

The men were sent on their way to Antioch, and when they arrived they gathered all the church together and delivered to them the letter from the church at Jerusalem. The Gentiles after reading it had great rejoicing.

Judas and Silas having been given from God the gift of functioning as prophets, encouraged the people with many words of exhortation. They stayed for a while and then it became time to return to the apostles in Jerusalem, but Silas was pleased to want to stay and so he did. Paul and Barnabas also continued as before and lived in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of God along with many others who did the same (Acts 15:22-35).

Paul And Barnabas Have Differences Over John Mark

Time went by and one day Paul said to Barnabas that they should go back to the churches they established on their first missionary journey, and encourage them and see how things were going for them all. Barnabas thought it was a good idea and wanted to take along with them John Mark. Paul did not think so, he just did not like the thought of taking John Mark with them again, because, if we remember, Mark had departed from them at Pamphylia, and had returned to Jerusalem, no longer wanting to do the work Paul and Barnabas were doing at the time for the Lord.

The contention over Mark coming with them or not, grew and grew between the two men, and the end result was that they both decided it was best to separate and go their different ways in doing God's work. So Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed to Cyprus. Paul chose to take Silas with him and was commended by the brethren for God's work and so departed. He and Silas went through Cilicia and Syria serving and helping the churches to endure in the faith delivered to them (Acts 15:36-41).

We see here NOT a difference in basic doctrinal belief or practice between two men of God as they were doing the work of the Lord, but what we might call "administrational thoughts" - how to, in what way to, and with whom, would the work of the Lord be done. Both men were still doing God's work, there was no "church disfellowshipment" going on here, no one was being asked to leave the Church of God. One apostle did not go to other apostles to try and have the other he disagreed with, thrown out of the church. This is important to remember in this example, for in some sects of Christianity they have done just this very thing, ministers differing over issues where difference should be allowed, they try to "gang up" with other ministers, to have the one they differ with cast out of their organization.

None of that went on here. Two ministers of God differed on how to do God's work, and who they should do it with. They could not come to agreement on the matter, and so they simply went their separate ways to perform the work of the Lord. They were still fully a part of God's work, and I'm sure were both still fully used to teach and spread the Gospel, and/or encourage those who were in the faith.

The rest of the book of Acts gives focus to Paul and the work God did through him over the next number of years.

CHAPTER 11

PAUL'S SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY

Acts 16

Paul had set off with Silas, and others like Luke (see verse 10 and the word "we") on his second missionary journey. They arrived in Derbe and Lystra, and in that area lived a disciples by the name of Timotheus (we know him as Timothy in the New Testament books that bear his name), his mother being a Jewess, and a believer, but his father was a Greek. Timotheus (we shall call him Timothy from now on) had a very good reputation with the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium. After Paul met him he knew he wanted Timothy to travel with him in spreading the Gospel and encouraging the brethren.



Paul, with Timothy's consent of course, wanted him to be circumcised, and he did consent. We are told this was because of Jews who lived in those parts, for they knew his father was a Greek. We must remember that this circumcision of Timothy was NOT in any way to effect salvation. The answer to this is found in the principle Paul often lived by which he writes about in 1 Corinthians 9:19-22. Some of the Jews

knew that Timothy's father was a Greek gentile and were pretty well sure Timothy was not circumcised, and they were correct.

Those Jews had a mind-set that still looked upon circumcision as extremely important, remember they had lived with this physical rite for many generations. They were not about to listen to, or have someone teaching them the word of God, like the man Timothy, who was not circumcised. Paul simply knew he and Silas, could not even get out of the dug-out with those Jews, in teaching Christ to them, and saying they had a third teacher of this truth with them, like Timothy, if he was not circumcised. So this was a circumcision of expediency, no more and no less. Paul was taking the principle as "while in Rome do as the Romans do" - he was as he wrote in 1 Cor. 9:20, "unto the Jews I became as a Jew....that I might gain them that are under the law."

With Timothy circumcised, those Jews were willing to let the men teach them about the Gospel they were bringing to them. Paul was now able to get on to first base and from there he could in time he hoped, get around all the bases to make a run and win some to Christ.

As they journey on and went through the villages, town, and cities, they delivered the decrees of the Jerusalem conference, which had been given by apostles and elders approval. So the churches they went to were established more and more in truth, in the faith, and many more new converts were added to the churches on a daily basis (Acts 16:1-5).



The Roman road from Tarsus

The Journey To Macedonia

The men proceeded on to Phrygia and to the region of Galatia (Paul will yet in the future write to the Galatians a very strong letter, because of false teachers leading them away into heresy). The Holy Spirit did not allow them to go further in Asia Minor or Turkey.

We are not told as to the why of this, only that they were not permitted to do so. They came to a town called Mysia and were thinking about going on to Bithynia, but again the Holy Spirit stopped them from doing so. Again we are not told why. So, they passed by Mysia and came to Troas. While there a vision came to Paul in the night. In the vision a man from Macedonia was calling out to Paul, "Please come over to us in Macedonia and help us."

Luke says that after Paul had the vision "we" set off for Macedonia because the Lord had surely called "us" to preach the Gospel there (verse 10). And "Leaving from Troas, WE came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis" (verse 11). From there they went to Philippi, which was the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and they stayed in that city for a certain number of days.

A Good Sabbath's Gain For God

On one of the Sabbath days they heard about a spot by the river where people gathered to pray. Paul and the other men with him went there and talked to the women that were at the gathering. We are not really told if any men were there at all, it may just have been a "women's" gathering. Well, they talked to the women, and one of them by the name of Lydia, a seller of purple material of some sort, who was from Thyaura, and who was also a sincere worshipper of God, listen to them. As she listened to Paul, the Lord opened her heart and her mind to realize this was the very truth of God she was receiving.



Paul speaks with Lydia and others by the river

Within a short time, we are not told exactly what length of time it was, she became a full believer in Jesus as the Messiah and as her personal Savior. We are told even her household became believers. All of them were baptized. Then she asked Paul and the others (once more Luke uses the word "us" - so it included himself) to stay in her house for a while. She pressed them to do so, and it would seem they did lodge with her for a time (Acts 16:13-15).

Paul And Silas In Prison

Paul and company were on their way to "prayer" - could have been that same spot by the river where they met Lydia - and out comes this lady possessed by, as the Greek reads - PITHON - he was the god Apollo, but we know it was a demon, but this demon, as many demons can, could "soothsay" as the KJV reads, which means, predicting future events. She had earned a lot of money for those who employed her and hired her out. This lady starts shouting at the top of her lungs to Paul and his companions, and everyone else around, "These men are the servants of the most

High God, which are telling us about the way to salvation!" She did this a number of times, then Paul finally had had enough, and turned to the spirit and said, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!" And within that hour of him saying this the demon did come out. Sometimes healing, be it physical or mental healing, does not always take place instantaneously.

Her employers were mightily mad at Paul, for now their gain of money from her predictions for others, was cut off. No more would this lady be a prophet to sell out her services to those willing to pay for her predictions. Her employers caught hold of Paul and Silas, brought them into the market place to the rulers of the town. They brought them to the magistrates and said to them, "Look, these men being Jews are exceedingly troubling our city. They are teaching customs which are not lawful or good for us to hear, and especially to observe, for we are Romans."

Now, if you know what the Romans practiced as customs, and what Jews observed as a way of life, then you can understand that Paul and company were sure not telling them to observe December the 25th, Easter, Valentine's Day, and worship of your god on Sunday. If they had been, and if the New Testament church was already observing such customs, then those Romans would have had no argument as the one they put forth to the magistrates of that town.

The crowd that had gathered by now, got worked up into a lather as we say, and so did the magistrates, who tore their clothes off themselves. And at the same time commanding that Paul and Silas be beaten. We are told that many stripes were laid on them, and then were cast into prison. The warden of the jail was told to keep them safe, and so he put them into the inside of the prison and fastened their feet in a type of foot clasp that locked them secure.

Once more we see that there could be times when we will come under physical persecution for teaching and preaching the word of God, and the Christian Gospel.

It was midnight and Paul and Silas were praying, and singing songs of praise to God, and all the prisoners heard it. Then....suddenly there was a massive earthquake, and the foundations of the prison were shaken, and then all the prison doors opened up and all the bands that held any prisoner were loose. The warden naturally was awakened out of his sleep, he runs to the inner part of the prison and seeing all the doors opened and the prisoners no longer fastened, and supposing they had escaped, he drew out his sword and was going to kill himself (he knew he was as good as dead for not making sure the prisoners were locked and chained). But Paul seeing him about to kill himself shouted out, "Do yourself no harm, we are all still here." The warden called for a light and came running in and stood before Paul and Silas, trembling like a leaf shaken in the wind.

The warden was of course greatly impressed. He asked, "What Sirs, must I do to be saved?" He was probably already a religious man in some way, and so knowing what Paul and Silas were doing in town, he knew by now the true God was indeed with them, and so he wanted to know the real way to salvation, and he knew those two men knew that way.

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," was the answer that he received from the two apostles, "and you can be saved, you, and your whole family and household," was the last words they gave him, to answer his question.



Paul and Silas in prison as an earthquake strikes which frees them from prison

The warden took Paul and Silas to his house that night, and there the two men of God taught him and all his household the word of the Lord. The warden bathed and washed their stripes all over their back from the beating they had received. And he and his entire household were baptized in the nearest pool of water, and then returning to his house he and his household rejoiced with Paul and Silas as they ate a meal together (Acts 16:16-34).

The workings of the Lord are wonderful to behold, even in what seems like dire straits, God can perform His work, and lives can be brought to repentance, baptism, and salvation through Christ Jesus.

An Apology From The Magistrates

For the sake of the warden Paul and Silas did not depart from the prison, for they knew the warden would be executed for letting them go without their authority. It was the next day now, and the magistrates sent word to say the two men of God could leave. The warden passed this on to them, but Paul said, "Well not so fast now, they have beaten us openly. We are also Roman citizens, and they have cast uncondemned Roman citizens into prison. No, we will not just disappear like that. But you tell them we want the magistrates to come themselves and tell us we can go free."

The message of Paul was relayed back to the magistrates, who on hearing they were Roman citizens, began to tremble with fear. And they soon came begging them to leave and to depart from the city. The two apostles went out of the city back to the

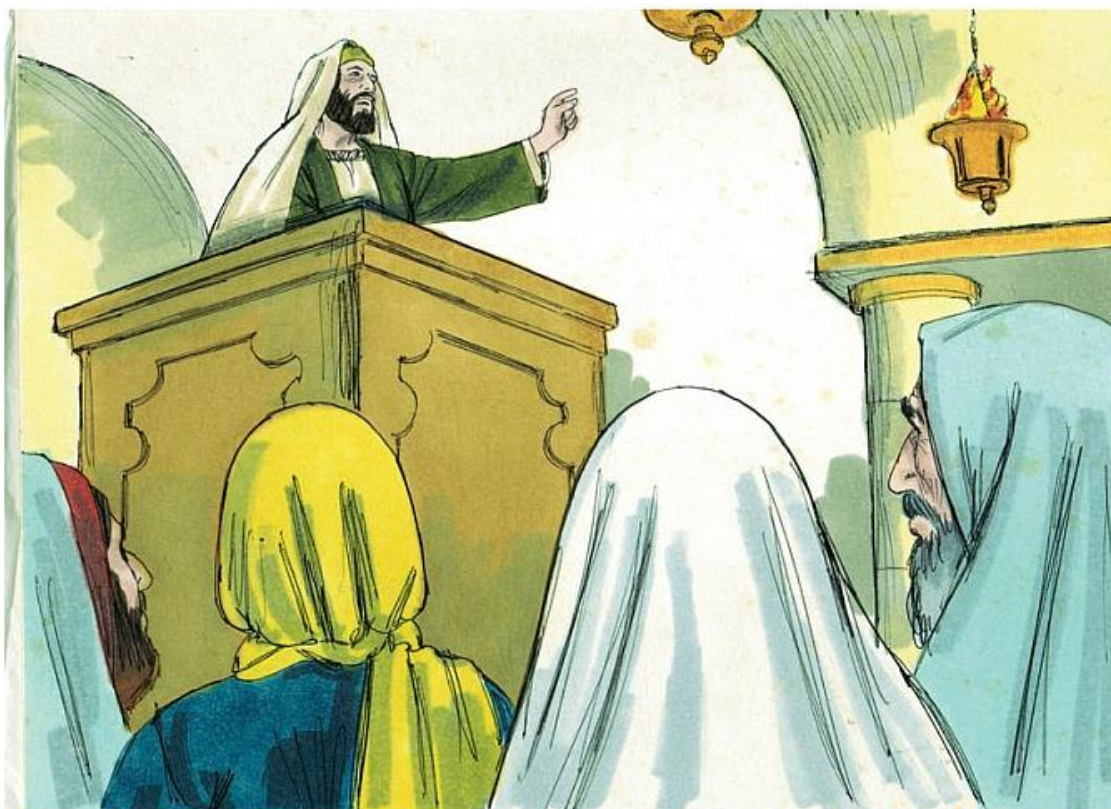
house of Lydia. After they had seen and comforted the brethren they departed (Acts 16:35-40).

Acts 17

Time In Thessalonica

Passing through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. As Paul's custom was at this time, he went there on three Sabbath days and reasoned with them from the Scriptures. His focus was that Christ needed to suffer, be killed, and be raised from the dead, and that this Jesus was the Christ, the appointed Messiah. Some believed, and ones like devout Greeks, quite a large gathering, and many important local women, often had company with Paul and Silas.

But as usual it would seem, the unconverted and unbelieving Jews were envious of the success this "new faith" was receiving, so they gathered some of the "bad guys of the city" and soon set the whole city in an uproar, and knowing that a man by the name of Jason often gave lodging to Paul and Silas, they headed for his house to bring out the two apostles to stand before the people. But they found them not there, so they took their anger out on Jason and some of the other brethren, bringing them before the magistrates and rulers of the city. This is what they said to those magistrates, "These people like Paul and Silas have turned the world upside down with their teachings and here they are among us also. And this Jason fellow receives them and shares his home with them. These fellows do and say contrary to the decrees of Caesar, for they teach that there is another king, namely this man called Jesus."



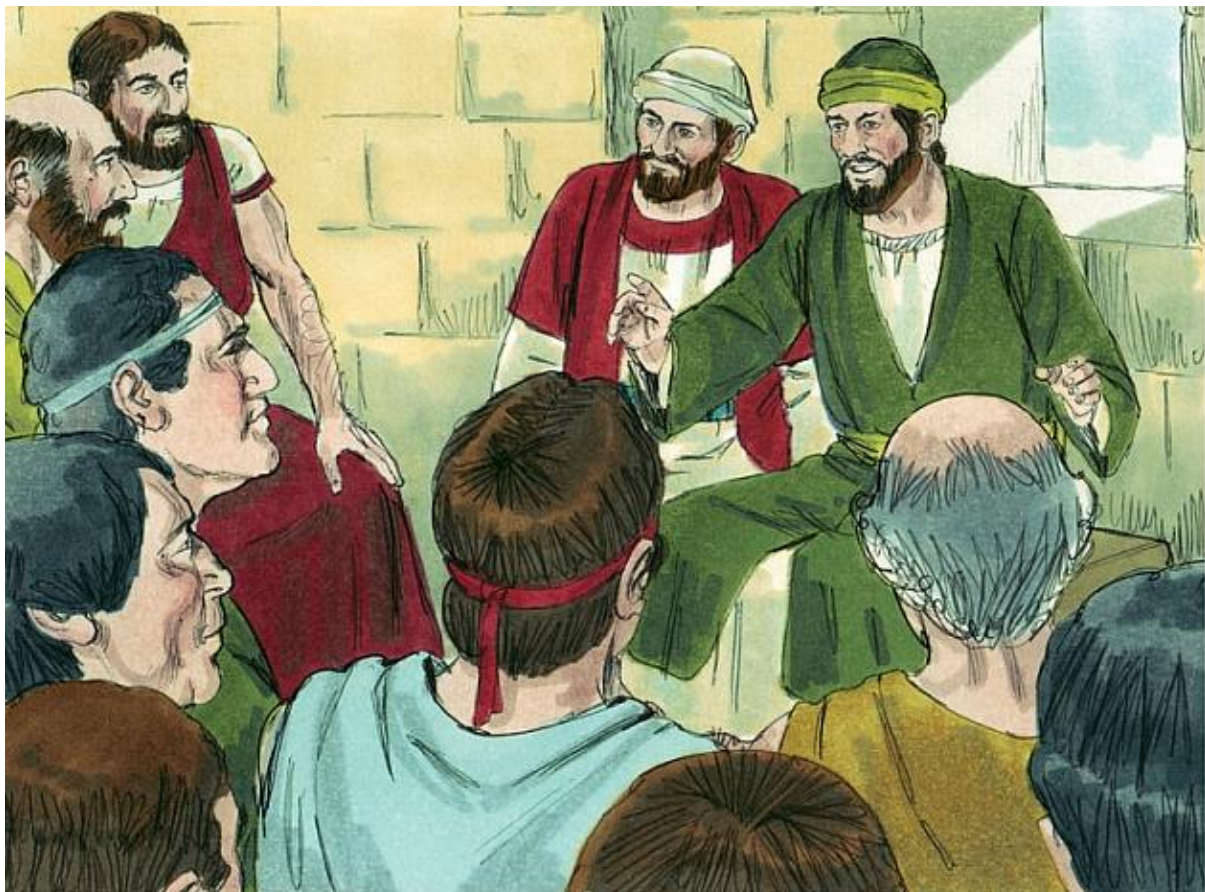
Paul reasoned with the people at Thessalonica for three sabbath days that Jesus was the promised Messiah and about the gospel of the kingdom of God

We see here how the Gospel had gone forth in about 20 years. It had gone forth in so much power that those at Thessalonica said they had "turned the world upside down." Quite a statement and quite a testimony. God certainly had been working very powerfully in the lives of the Church of God members and many men who had been called to spend much of their time teaching and preaching Jesus as the Messiah, and as the Savior for salvation.

When all these things that were slanted towards Paul and Silas in an evil way, the people and the rulers of the city became very troubled. But the city officials released Jason and the other believers, after they had deposited bail money (Acts 17:1-9).

It was time the brethren thought to get Paul and Silas out of the city very quickly, with no time to spare, so at night time they sent them away to Berea: When arriving in Berea, they did exactly as they had before, they went to the synagogue of the Jews, and preached the word of God.

The Jews and others in the synagogue were far different than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word of God with a readiness of mind to listen, and then they set about searching the Scriptures to ascertain that what they heard was in accordance with the Scriptures. And because they were willing to do this, many of them believed, even honorable and successful Greek women, and many of the men both Jews and Greeks.



"[The Bereans] were more noble than those of Thessalonica, in that they received the Word with all readiness of mind and searched the Scriptures daily to see if those things were so" (Acts 17:11).

It's a very important principle and attitude of mind that all of God's children must have at all times, that is the one the Bereans exhibited here....listen but SEARCH the Scriptures to see if what you hear lines up with the word of God. And it was Jesus who promised that whoever hungers and thirst after righteousness WILL be filled. Jesus also promised that when the Spirit of truth came (as it did on and after Pentecost day of Acts 2) it would GUIDE people into all truth. Those promises we read about when we went through the Gospels. But we need to also remember that the Holy Spirit does not give us ALL truth ALL at once, sometimes God chooses to spread it over our entire life time. We must always then be ready to admit error and walk on new light and truth when revealed to us. Then in that walk we need to do as the Bereans did, and search the Scriptures. We need to have our nose in the Bible, reading it from cover to cover, only in that way will we be never led astray and into false ideas and doctrines of men.

Well, the Jews of Thessalonica heard about what was going on in Berea. They realized Paul was still preaching away, and some of them came over to Berea, and set about doing what they had done in their home city, getting the people angry at Paul especially.

Once more the brethren sent Paul away, but Silas and Timothy for reasons not given to us, decided to stay in Berea. Paul came now to Athens, but then sent for Silas and Timothy, who, after receiving the strong request from Paul, set off without haste to be with him again (Acts 17:13-15).

Paul At Athens

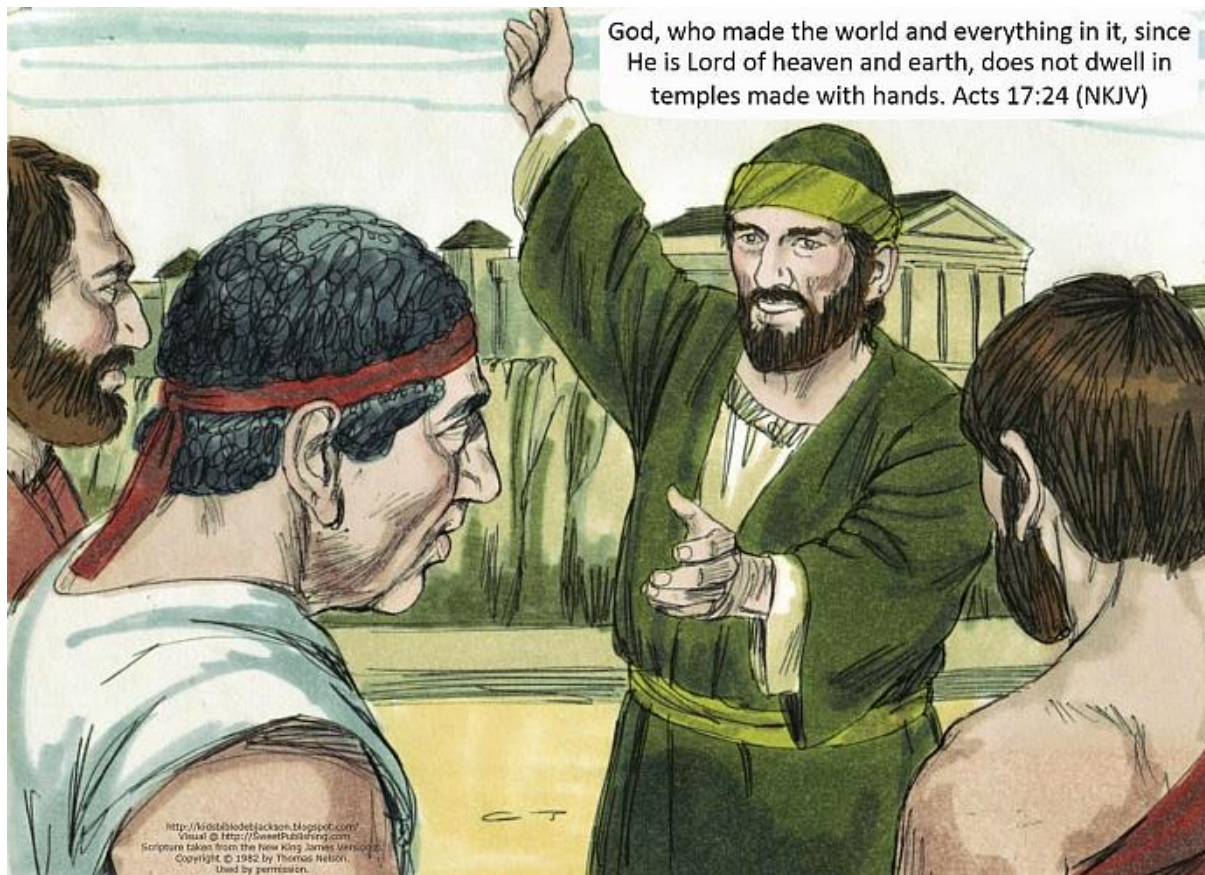
While Paul was waiting for Silas and Timothy to arrive, he was in anguish over seeing the whole city of Athens given to idolatry. Idolatry in various form was rampant among Gentile nations, but it was especially so in Athens. Paul was again disputing with the Jews in the synagogue, with religious persons, and with all in the market places who would come to hear him speak. Then some of the Epicurean and Stoic "philosophers" came to hear him teach, and soon some of them were making fun of him and saying, "What will this babbler say next?" Others of them said, "He seems to be talking about a very strange god." They thought it was strange theology Paul taught because he preached about a Jesus man, and the resurrection from the dead.

They took him to the Council of Philosophers (Greek is Areopagus in the KJV), who said to Paul, "Come, tell us more about this new religion. You are saying some rather startling things, so we want to know more." Athens was full of people discussing all kinds of ideas, it was a very "intellectually" minded city.

So Paul, standing before them, in the middle of the Areopagus council, said:

"Men of Athens, I can see that you are a very religious people, for I was walking along and noticing how many altars you have. And one of them had this inscription on it, 'To an Unknown God.' You have been worshipping this God without knowing who he was. I want to tell you about Him. He is the God who made the world and everything you see in it. Since He is the Lord of heaven and earth, He does not live in Temples made by human hands. Human hands cannot serve His needs, for He does not have any needs. He Himself is the one who gives life and breath to all creatures. And it is He who satisfies every need there is. It was from just one human

man that He created every nation on earth. He decided beforehand which nation would rise and which would fall, and He determined their boundaries. The purpose behind all this was to have the nations seek after Him and move towards Him and find Him, though He is not really very far from any of us. For it is in him that we live and move and exist. As one of your own poets has said, 'We are his off-spring.' And since this is very true, we should not think of God as some idol made and formed by the hands of men from some gold or silver or stone. God in the past overlooked people's ignorance about these things, but now is the time when He commands people everywhere to turn from idols and repent. For He has set a day and time to judge all the world with justice, by the man I preach to you, and He showed to all who this man is by raising Him from the dead to immortal life."



Paul speaks on Mars Hill in Athens

You will notice the emphasis Paul gives to REPENTANCE in the above message. Repentance of sin, turning from sin to walk in the ways and the will and the commandments of God is taught over and over again in the Bible, both in the Old and New Testament. Repentance is a very crucial part of the Gospel message, sometimes today not given the importance that it should be given.

When they heard this talk of the resurrection from the dead, some laughed at Paul, but some also said, "We would like to hear more about all this, but not at this time, sometime later would be best." So, Paul ended his discourse with them. Yet some joined themselves to him, following him around, and so in time became believers. One of those who became a believer was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus council, also a women named Damaris, and some others (Acts 17:16-34).

I suspect that in Luke giving us the two names just mentioned, they were well known at the time among the people of Athens.

Acts 18

After all that had happened to Paul in Athens he departed from there and went to Corinth.

Paul was not able to start a church in Athens, only to convert a relatively few to accepting Jesus as Savior and Messiah and to walk in the way of the Lord.

What was it about Athens that netted only a few converts (putting aside the foundation that it is God's doing and calling in the first place, to bring anyone to repentance and conversion). Athens was quite the city for massive heathen worship of false gods, and for human philosophy. The city was named after the patron goddess Athena, and the capital of the important Greek state of Attica, which became the cultural center of the ancient pre-Christian world. It grew up around the 512-foot-high Acropolis and was connected with its seaport Piraeus by long walls in the days of its glory.

The city was captured by the Romans in 146 B.C. and was under Roman rule when Paul came to it. They were well known for going about in the marketplace asking "What news?" They were a "religious" lot of people as we have seen from Paul's remarks. It is recorded by some historians that the people of Athens surpassed all other states in the attention that they paid to the worship of gods. So the city was crowded in every direction with temples, altars, and other sacred buildings. Mars' Hill or the Areopagus was at the west approach to the Acropolis. As we have seen Paul preached there to the devotees of three current at the time, philosophies - Platonism, Stoicism, and Epicureanism (see your Encyclopedias for information on those philosophies).

Paul made use of his Hellenistic culture by quoting from a familiar verse taken from an invocation to Zeus, written by a minor Cilician poet, Aratus (312-245 B.C.). Paul may have visited the great music hall or Odeion of Pericles (cf. 1 Cor. 13:1) and the great Tower and Water clock of Andronicus (cf. 5:16). He may also have visited the "keramikos" or pottery-making section of the city, which was famous (cf. Rom.9:21).

The aforementioned facts of history were taken from the "New Unger's Bible Dictionary" - Moody Press.

Now we can see from a human point of view why it may have been so difficult for Paul to convert people to the Gospel of Christ, for the city was deeply entrenched in much pagan god worship and humanistic philosophies.

Paul moved on to Corinth. Now Corinth itself was quite the city. Corinth was Greece's most splendid commercial city. Its strategic situation made it the mecca of trade between the East and the West. The city derived rich income from transport of cargo across the narrow isthmus, about five miles in width. The Romans completely destroyed the city in 146 B.C. But Julius Caesar restored it in 46 B.C. It grew so rapidly that it was made Achaia's capital (from "the New Unger's Bible Dictionary" - Moody Press).

From "Barnes' Notes on the New Testament" we learn this:

"...the city of Corinth was built at the foot of a high hill, on the top of which stood a citadel....The circumference of the city proper was about forty stadia, or five miles....The city of Corinth, thus became the mart of Asia, and Europe, covered the sea with its ships, and formed a navy to protect its commerce.....Its population and wealth was thus increased by the influx of foreigners.....It was the mart of the world. Wealth flowed into it from all quarters. Luxury, amusements, and dissipation, were the natural consequences, until it became the most gay and dissolute city of its time....There was another cause which contributed to its character of dissoluteness and corruption. I refer to its religion. The principal deity worshipped in the city was Venus....Her shrine appeared above those of other gods; and it was enjoined by law, that one thousand beautiful females should officiate as courtesans, or public prostitutes, before the altar of the goddess of love....the effect of this on the morals of the city can be easily understood. It became the most gay, dissipated, corrupt, and ultimately the most effeminate and feeble portion of Greece....Though Corinth was thus dissipated and licentious in its character, yet it was also distinguished for its refinement and learning. Every part of literature was cultivated there.....By the Romans, the whole of Greece was divided into two provinces, Macedonia and Achaia. Of the latter, Corinth was the capital; and this was its condition when it was visited by Paul...."

Paul had quite the task ahead of him, if he wanted to establish a church in this city of Corinth, but as we shall see, he succeeded, and succeeded in a mighty way, and those who came after him added to the increase of the membership of the congregation. But we shall also find that they had many serious problems which Paul had to correct later in his epistles to them. But we are getting ahead of our story. Back to when Paul first went there and Acts chapter 18.



Ancient Corinth

Just about immediately Paul found a Jew in the city by the name of Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently moved there with his wife Priscilla. They had left Rome when Claudius the Roman king of the time, commanded all Jews to leave Rome. Paul was naturally drawn to Aquila and Priscilla because they and him were of the same secular trade, they were all tentmakers. He then abode or lodged with them.

As usual Paul was in the synagogue teaching and preaching about Jesus as the Christ. When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was stirred even more to forcefully testify to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ or Messiah. We are often lifted up when our closest friends of the same mind are with us, the encouragement to do God's work is contagious, and so it seemed to be for Paul when his Gospel companions and fellow ministers arrived to be with him once more.

Yes, as before, there were those Jews who were against Paul's teaching, and got so angry they started to blaspheme, and argue among themselves. Paul then shook his clothes (a common practice to tell people you were out of patience and through with them) and said to them, "Your blood be upon your own heads; I know what is correct, and I am clean from sin. I will from now on put my efforts into going to the Gentiles."

This is the mark in time that established Paul as MAINLY a teacher and preacher to non-Jews. We are not told in so many words but we can safely assume from the context of the chapter, that Aquila and Priscilla were converted to the Christian Gospel in some way before Paul came to Corinth, or that Paul himself was the instrument to bring them to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Paul left the synagogue after turning his back on the unbelieving Jews and entered the house of one called Justus, a man that worshipped God, whose house was actually joined to the synagogue. We are told also that Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord and so did all his household, as well as many of the Corinthians, who heard the Gospel message. They believed and were baptized. So it was that the Corinthian Church of God was formed.

One night the Lord came to Paul in a vision saying, "Paul, be not afraid, but speak, and do not hold your tongue, for I am with you, and this time no man is going to hurt you in any physical way; for I have decided to call many people to accepting me in this city."

Was Paul ever overjoyed at this revelation. He was like a child with a brand new toy that he'd desired for ages and now had obtained. He continued in Corinth for about one year and six months, teaching the word of God among the people.

The time came that a new governor by the name of Gallio was over the region of Achaia. Some of the unbelieving Jews thought that they perhaps had a "political religious" governor who would side with them, or it may have been they had been told by the leader of the synagogue that Gallio would side with them against Paul. Whichever way it was those Jews brought Paul before the judgment court of this new governor of Achaia.

They accused Paul of "persuading people to worship God in ways that are contrary to the law." Paul was about to make his defense. But Gallio turned to his accusers and said, "Listen, you Jews, if this were a case of someone involved with genuine wrongdoing or a serious crime, I would be obliged to have to hear what you say. But since this is merely a question of words and names and things that concern your Jewish laws, then you look after it, I refuse to get involved in this kind of judgment. So get out of here!"

The Jewish mob on leaving, grabbed hold of Sosthenes, the leader of the synagogue and beat him up, right in the courtroom, but Gallio just pretended he saw nothing, and paid no attention to their actions.

We can again assume two reasons for the mob beating up this Jewish synagogue leader. Either he was initially on their side and had persuaded them that Gallio would listen to them and even judge in favor of condemning Paul, or he was on Paul's side and they thought he had some "influence" with Gallio to throw them all out on their ear. Whichever way it was, the Jewish mob beat him up right in front of Gallio, who simply paid no attention.

Paul continued to stay in Corinth for some time after that event in his life. We are not told for how long he remained in Corinth, but he finally said goodbye to the Christians there, and sailed for the coast of Syria, taking Priscilla and Aquila with him (Acts 18:1-18).

It is thought that he wrote his first two New Testament epistles to the church at Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians & 2 Thessalonians) while he was based at Corinth.

Paul stayed in Corinth for a good while indeed, but the time came for him to move on again. He sailed to go to Syria, but first came to Ephesus. He brought with him Priscilla and Aquila. He had shorn his head in Cenchrea; for he had a vow.

Cenchrea was the eastern sea port of Corinth. The vow was probably the Nazarite vow of Numbers 6. We must remember that there was a transition of Old Testament and New Testament. The Temple still stood in Jerusalem. The priesthood still functioned. It was not wrong for Christians to observe Old Testament rites such as the Nazarite vow, and even Temple rituals and Temple sacrifices. We shall come to Temple rituals observed by some in the Christian church in a later chapter of Acts. But we also need to remember that no Christian was obliged to observe any of those physical rites.

Ephesus was a celebrated city in Ionia, Asia Minor, about forty miles south of Smyrna. It was chiefly famous for the temple of Diana. In the time of the Romans it was the metropolis of Asia. The Jews, according to Josephus, the Jewish historian of the first century A.D., were numerous in that city.

As was Paul's custom he entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews concerning the Scriptures. They were willing to listen to what he had to say and wanted to hear more, they wanted Paul to stay around for a while, but he was not about to do so this time. He said goodbye to them saying, "I must by all means observe this feast that is coming in Jerusalem; but I will return again to you, if it is God's will."

Some believe the feast that Paul was wanting to observe at Jerusalem was the Passover, but we cannot be sure what feast it was, for Luke does not get specific in recording exactly which feast it was. Observing God's festivals of Leviticus 23 was very much still the custom and tradition of the Church of God during apostolic times. Jesus observed the festivals as we saw from the four Gospel records. They truly are God's feasts as clearly stated in Leviticus 23.

CHAPTER 12

PAUL'S THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY

Paul landed at Caesarea and went up to Jerusalem, observed the festival and visited the church at the same time. He then departed from Jerusalem and returned to his home base, the city of Antioch in Syria. (Acts 18:18-22).

Paul once more spent some time in Antioch, the length of time we are not told. Then he departed again and went over the areas of Galatia and Phrygia to once more strengthen spiritually the brethren in the churches there.

Now Luke tells us about something that was going on back in Ephesus, where Aquila and Priscilla had been left by Paul when he only departed for Jerusalem. A certain Jew by the name of Apollos, comes on the scene. He was born in the city of Alexandria, a celebrated city in Egypt, founded by Alexander the Great. You may want to read about that city in some of the Bible Encyclopedias.

Apollos, had been instructed in "the way of the Lord" - that is he had certain knowledge of the things concerning the Messiah. He was fervent in attitude of mind, he spoke and taught very diligently the things of the Lord, but he was only familiar with the baptism of John the Baptist. He was then "not up to date" as we might say. But he went to the synagogue and spoke very boldly what truth he did know. Aquila and Priscilla met him there and then took him privately and expounded the way of God and the Messiah more perfectly to him.

Apollos was led to think that he should go to Achaia, so the brethren at Ephesus wrote a letter exhorting the disciples there to receive him. And they indeed did so. Apollos was a great blessing to them, for in visiting there he helped them tremendously in spiritual matters, helping all who had believed through grace. And it is said he mightily convinced the Jews, right out in a public way, showing from the Scriptures, that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah.

We are told nothing else about this man and the work he did in any specific way. Paul does mention him in his letter to the Corinthians, as one that had gained such popularity and "fame" shall we say, that some were making him as a kind of "cult" leader for themselves, while others made other apostles their "cult" leader, which Paul said was wrong for them all to do (1 Cor.1:10-13). Paul said he planted the Gospel seeds and Apollos watered, but it was God behind it all anyway, and it was God who gave the increase (1 Cor.3:5-9).

Acts 19

While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul passed over to Ephesus (Acts 19:1). We are never told if Paul and Apollos ever met. Maybe they did, maybe they did not. But we are told that both men were used mightily in doing God's work.

Paul now again in Ephesus finds certain disciples and says to them, "Have you received the Holy Spirit since you believed in the Messiah?" They replied, "Why, we have not been instructed in whether there is a Holy Spirit." And when Paul heard that, he asked with a somewhat puzzled look on his face, "Well then, into what were you baptized?" Their answer was immediate, "We have been baptized with John's

baptism." Then Paul realized what had not been instructed to them, and answered, "John truly baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying to the people, that they should believe on Him that was to come after himself, that is on Christ Jesus."

On hearing this there was no question in their minds that they wanted to be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. When, after baptism, Paul laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them; and they were given the gift of speaking in a different language as well as speaking under the inspiration of the Spirit. There were about twelve of those disciples we are informed (Acts 19:1-7).



We can note here that anyone who had ever been baptized with John's baptism, did need to be baptized in the name of Jesus. John's baptism was good up to a certain point only, but only to lead people to believe on the Him that would come after his ministry was over - who was Jesus the Christ.

We see again the teaching of the "laying on of hands." We see also in this case, two gifts of the Spirit given. But other people were baptized, many, even thousands, where no such gifts were given, at least we are not told that any gifts of the Spirit were given at that time of their baptism.

Paul, yes, as his custom was, went into the synagogue, and for three months spoke very boldly, disputing and persuading the things concerning the Kingdom of God. Some became hardened and began to speak evil of "the way" that Paul was teaching, and they influenced others, quite a large group, and so Paul departed from them, and took the disciples with him. He went to dispute in a school owned by a man called Tyrannus. Paul continued teaching and disputing in this school for two years. So successful was he that just about all in Asia Minor heard the word of the Lord Jesus in some way, both Jews and Greeks (Acts 19:9-10).

A Special Miracle By Paul

It was also at this time that God did special miracles by the hands of Paul. He sent out handkerchiefs or small aprons to the sick and they were healed every one of them, and those that were possessed of demons, were released from their power, as the demons withdrew from them (verse 11).

It is important to note in this, that Luke wrote God "did SPECIAL miracles by the hands of Paul." This was a special miracle for that time and for a certain duration only. The account in Acts as well as the whole New Testament says nothing about Paul doing this miracle for the rest of his life. We can also note that nothing is said about those handkerchiefs being anointed with oil.

I mention all this because some think this miracle done by Paul was something the Church of God was doing as a whole, or that the Church of God today should be doing this. It was NOT something all the church apostles or elders of the church back in Paul's day were doing. It is said God did this special miracle by Paul, and no one else is recorded as being able to perform this special miracle. This is clearly NOT an example for the Church of God as a whole to try to duplicate today.²

We are instructed in James 5 what is to be the GENERAL practice for the healing of the sick in the Church of God. That instruction is for the sick to call for the elders (more than one) to come and pray for the sick, and to anoint them with oil. If for some reason no elders can come (i.e. say distance being a factor), then disciples of Christ should mention their sickness to other disciples and have them pray for them (James 5:16).

Using Jesus' Name Incorrectly

Some vagabond Jews, ones who travelled from town to town casting out demons, tried to add some more power to their undertaking. They were not disciples of Christ. They knew or had seen what Paul could do by using the name of Jesus, so they thought they would try a little "Paul to Jesus incantation" - they said, "I command you by Jesus, whom Paul preaches, to come out."

² **EDITOR'S NOTE:** I am not entirely sure about this point. There's not enough information to be sure one way or the other. As it has been a custom in much of the Church of God in recent decades it would be interesting to know how much success there has been with clear miracles where anointing cloths have been used.

Seven sons of a leading priest called Sceva, were trying this incantation on a man possessed by an evil spirit, and the spirit replied, "I know Jesus, and I know Paul, but who are you fellows?" And the man leaped on them and attacked them with such violent strength that they fled from the house, naked and badly injured (Acts 19:13-16).

Those unbelieving Jews were just trying to see if the power used by Paul could be used by them. They thought they could enlarge their popularity and prestige if more instant miracle power could be had by the name of Jesus. Their hearts were not at all in the right place, they were as we say, "trying to cash in on a good deal." And of course they could not fool God in heaven for one second.

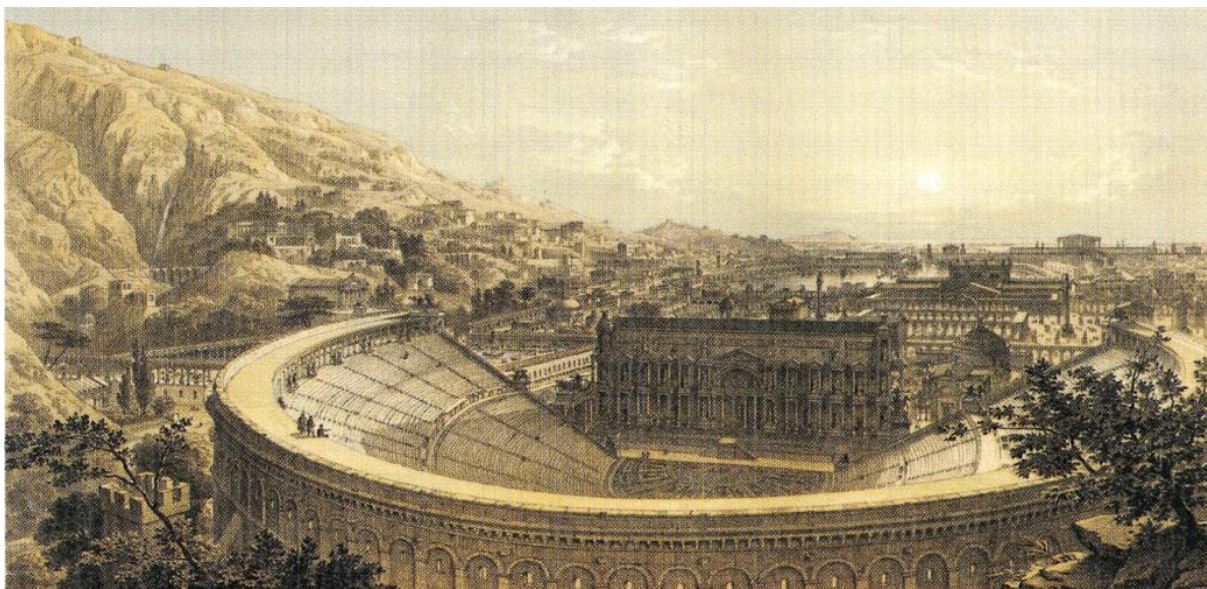
More Became Believers

The story of what happened to those seven sons of Sceva, spread like wildfire throughout Ephesus, both to Jews and Greeks. A solemn fear came upon all the people of that city, and the name of the Lord Jesus was greatly honored. Many who became believers and disciples confessed their sinful practices, often in an open way. Some who had been practicing various magic rites brought their instructive incantation books and burned them in a public bonfire. The value of all the books was about 50,000 pieces of silver, which today would have been several million dollars. One piece of silver was about a day's wage at that time.

So the message of the word of God spread near and far, and had a very powerful effect on people's lives (Acts 19:17-20).

The Riot In Ephesus

The Holy Spirit impelled Paul to go to Macedonia and Achaia before returning once more to Jerusalem. And then Paul thought it would be time to go from there to Rome, which he had not as yet done. He sent two of his fellow workers in the Gospel, Timothy and Erastus, on ahead to Macedonia while he stayed for a while longer in the province of Asia.



The City of Ephesus

But at that time serious trouble developed in Ephesus concerning "the way" as it was now often called. It began with Demetrius, a silversmith who had a large manufacturing business, making silver shrines of the Greek goddess Diana. He employed many a craftsmen. He called the craftsmen together one day, as well as other skilled men of related trades, and said to them:



"Fellow tradesmen, you know that our wealth comes from this trade with the worship of Diana. As you have seen and heard, this man Paul has persuaded many people that handmade gods aren't gods at all. And this is happening not only here in Ephesus but throughout the whole province. Of course I'm not just talking about the respect we have lost for our trade, but I also worry that the temple of the great goddess Diana - this splendid goddess worshipped throughout Asia and all around the Roman world - will have her prestige disappearing."

At hearing this fact, it hit them as never before as to what was happening concerning their goddess Diana. They boiled with anger and started to shout as loud as they could, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" They shouted more, "Great is the goddess Diana!" And on and on they went with, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" Soon a crowd gathered around them, then more and more people, until the whole city was in an uproar and utter confusion everywhere set in. Then they all rushed to the Amphitheater, their football stadium of their day. They dragged along with them, Gaius and Aristarchus, who were Paul's travelling companions from Macedonia.

Paul wanted to go after them, to try and rescue his friends, but many of the disciples prevented him from doing so. Some of the officials of the area, friends of Paul, also sent messages to him, begging him not to risk his life being taken by entering the Amphitheater. Inside their stadium all the people were shouting out, some one thing, some others another thing, the whole place was in total confusion and bedlam. The fact was that most of the people there did not know why they were there in the first place, they followed the crowd, some just looking for an excuse to riot. A man by the

name of Alexander was pushed forward by some of the Jews, who encouraged him to explain the situation to everyone. He motioned for silence and then would have made his defence, but when the crowd realized he was a Jew, they started shouting again as one voice, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians! Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" And they kept up those kind of shouting for two full hours.

Finally the town mayor was able to appease the people so he was able to speak.

"Citizens of Ephesus," he said: "Everyone knows that Ephesus is the official guardian of the great temple of Diana, whose image fell down to us from heaven. As this is the fact, you should not be disturbed, no matter what is said. Don't do anything in a senseless rash way. You have brought these men here but they really have done no harm to you. They have stolen nothing from the temple, and they have not spoken against your goddess. If Demetrius and the craftsmen with him have a case against these men, the courts are in session and the judges can hear the case immediately. Let them go through the legal channels of our city. And if there are other complaints about other matters they can be brought before the courts in a legal way. I am afraid we are in danger of the Roman government charging us with rioting, since there is no justifiable cause for all this commotion and disturbance that is taking place here. And if Rome demands an explanation, we will not know what to tell them."

With this sensible and logical speech the crowd dispersed and went back to their normal everyday living. After all this near riot was over Paul called for the disciples, and exhorted and encourage them, and then said goodbye and left for Macedonia (Act 19:21-41; 20:1).

While Paul lived in Ephesus most scholars believe he wrote his two epistles to the Church at Corinth - the epistles called 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians.

Following his time in Ephesus he then visited the church at Corinth in southern Greece which we'll see brief reference to in the next chapter before he headed back to Ephesus.

CHAPTER 13

PAUL MOVES ON FROM EPHESUS DURING HIS THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY

Acts 20

The books of Galatians and Romans are thought to have been written by Paul while in the city of Corinth (Acts 20:2-3).

We pick up his travels in Acts 20 verse 4. Several men were travelling with Paul and the names of some are given, Timothy is no doubt the most well-known name, as Paul wrote two epistles to him, that are preserved for us in the New Testament.

We are told they went ahead and waited for "us" (probably meaning Paul and Luke as it was Luke who wrote and compiled the book of Acts), at Troas. As soon as the days of Unleavened Bread were over (indicating they still gave honor and respect to those days of the Passover season. We have seen in 1 Corinthians 5 that Paul told the church at Corinth, they should observe those days with a new spirit of heart), they (Paul and Luke) boarded a ship at Philippi in Macedonia and five days later arrived at Troas, and there they stayed for a week.

This was about the year A.D. 57 or 58 as best we can gather, but the exact year is really unimportant, as Luke does not put any emphasis on the exact chronology of most events he recorded.

It was on the first day of the week that Paul and many disciples (as well as many interested locals) gathered together to "break bread" - which simply meant they gathered to have a meal together, and has nothing to do with the observance of the "Lord's supper" or "communion" as many today call the remembrance of Jesus' death. It was the first day of the week and Paul was preaching and teaching. He was going to leave the next day, so he continued preaching until midnight, wanting to make the best of every minute he had with them, in giving instructions and explanations of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now, some have jumped to the conclusion that this preaching "till midnight" was a Saturday evening, saying the Bible counts days from evening to evening, so, as this was the first day of the week, it must therefore have been Saturday evening. It is true that the Lord does count days from evening to evening as we see in the first chapter of Genesis, but sometimes writers of the Bible wrote within the time setting of the general society they lived in. And that society Luke lived in was under Roman rule and influence. It is then quite possible Luke wrote within Roman usage of the day, which if that is the case here, then this meeting took place on Sunday evening, not Saturday evening, and Paul was going to leave on Monday not on a Sunday.

The case cannot be proved either way. Those who want to insist it was a Sunday evening "church meeting" use it to try and say Sunday was now the New Testament weekly Sabbath. This is merely the wishful thinking of those who hold that theological teaching. The rest of the whole New Testament gives no weight to that theological belief, and secular recorded history certainly does not back up that teaching. There is no indication or straight-forward talk by anyone in the New

Testament that at the death of Christ and His resurrection the FOURTH commandment of the great Ten Commandments was changed from the SEVENTH day of the week (Saturday) to the FIRST day of the week (Sunday).

Not ONE verse in the New Testament ever calls the first day of the week, HOLY, or BLESSED, or SANCTIFIED, or a day of REST from secular work. How easy it would have been for any one writer of the New Testament to have said somewhere in all they wrote, "We sanctify and keep holy the first day of the week in honor of our Savior's resurrection" or "God has now commanded us to keep holy the first day of the week because His Son was resurrected on that day." Such words or such a sentence would have been so easy for anyone to have somewhere incased in their epistles and letters of the New Testament, but SUCH WORDS CANNOT be found.

Acts 20:7 and 8 CANNOT be used to support a sanctified or holy day for the first day of the week!

Paul was speaking on and on, as we have seen, he spoke till mid-night. A young man named Eutychus was sitting on the window sill, and became very drowsy, heavy eyed, and kept nodding off to sleep. Finally he just went into a deep sleep and then fell three stories down to his death. Paul immediately ran over to him, took him in his arms and said to them all, "Don't be alarmed, he is alive." It was a miracle, Luke tells us the young man HAD died, was killed from his fall, but Paul through the power of the Holy Spirit, had brought him back to life. They were all overjoyed. It was a good time for Paul to now stop his preaching, and they all "broke bread" and had some food together.

Paul though was not finished talking to them about the Lord and the Gospel. After they had had the refreshments, he again continued talking to them right up to the break of day. Then Paul departed. The young man we are told was taken home completely unhurt, and all were joyous and relieved of any worry or sorrow over his fall.

Yes this was an all-night preaching and teaching seminar we might say today. No doubt everyone was pumped up with excitement and enthusiasm, and except for the one young man, all were able to be awake and attentive. When you are in this frame of mind the body is able to go through the night without sleep, but I'm sure they all had a good sleep the next day after Paul and his companions left (Acts 20:4-12).

Paul Meets With The Ephesian Elders

Paul actually went on by land to Assos, while all the rest of his companions went on by ship ahead of him. Paul did join them there and they all sailed on together to Mitylene. Why Paul went by land and the others by sea is not told to us. Luke just records the fact of it. The second day of sailing they passed the island of Kios. The day following they crossed to the island of Samos, and a day later they arrived at Miletus (Acts 20:13-15).

Paul had decided not to stop at Ephesus this time, he did not want to spend any time in Asia, as he was hurrying to get to Jerusalem for the great feast of Pentecost. The Greek can be understood to read that he was wanting to "observe" to "keep" to "celebrate" the feast of Pentecost at Jerusalem, not that Jerusalem was still the only place to observe the Feasts of the Lord. We saw in past chapters how that Paul at

one point in his life had NOT BEEN in Jerusalem for FOURTEEN YEARS! Obviously being in Jerusalem this time for Pentecost was important to Paul as He felt He was being led by God to do so.

When they all landed at Miletus, Paul sent a message to the Elders of the church at Ephesus, asking them to come and meet with him. They did come.

Before we read the important words what Paul had to say to them, we need to note that this church (and so naturally others) DID HAVE "elders." Some in the Churches of God and other sects, have the modern notion that "spiritual elders" are a thing of the far past ages, and that all in the "church" today (men and women) can be, and in their teaching, ARE, all "elders." We see here that Paul did NOT call ALL the church members of Ephesus to come and meet with him, but he called the "elders" of the church at Ephesus to meet with him. And we shall see from the very words of Paul to them, that he TAUGHT and he PRACTICED, the theology, that there were spiritual "elders" over the "churches" of God, who did indeed have the calling to be spiritual "shepherds" to the flocks of God. Truly, all the apostles believed that this was so, as we see the apostle James writing to the twelve tribes scattered abroad (James 1:1), that NOT MANY of them should be "masters" or "teachers" in the church (see the modern translations on this verse - James 3:1).

Paul addressed the Elders of Ephesus and said:

"You know from the day I set foot in the province of Asia until this day, I have done the Lord's work in a humble manner. Yes, and at times, with tears. I endured the trials that came to me from the plotting of the Jews against me. Yet, despite all that, I never shrank from telling you the truth, either publicly or in your private homes. I have had one message for Jews and Gentiles alike - the need to turn from sin and to turn to God, and have faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

"Now I am going to Jerusalem, as the Holy Spirit has said I must, yet not knowing exactly what is waiting for me there, except as I've been informed by the Spirit, I'll have suffering and many times be put in jail, in various places and cities. But my life is really worth nothing if I do not serve the calling and work of the Lord that I have been called to do, which is to tell others of the Good News about God's great kindness, mercy, and love.

"I do know this though, none of you to whom I have preached the Kingdom of God, will see me again in this life time. I tell you that I have been faithful, and no one's damnation can be blamed on me, for I did not shrink back to declaring and teaching you ALL that God wants for you in how to live, think, and practice.

"Now, BEWARE! Be sure that you feed and shepherd the flock of God - His called out ones - His church - that have been purchased with His own blood. The Holy Spirit has appointed you and made you spiritual Elders and OVERSEERS over His flock. I know of a certainty that FALSE teachers like wolves will come into the flock, not sparing them, but attacking and devouring them. Yes, as shocking as this may sound, even SOME OF YOU, will distort the truth to gain a following.

"WATCH OUT! Remember the three years I was with you - remember my constant watch and care I had over you, day and night, and the many tears I shed for you. I have never coveted anyone's money or fine clothes or material blessings. You know

my own hands have worked to pay my own way, and even supplied the physical needs of some who were with me. I have been a constant example of how you can help the poor by working hard with your skills. You need to remember the words of our Lord, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' "

When Paul had finished speaking, we are told he knelt and prayed with them. Ah, it is good at times to kneel with some of God's children and pray. There will indeed be times when this is very important to do. Paul knew this was one of those times. We are told the elders "wept aloud as they embraced him in farewell, sad most of all because he had told them that they would never see him again in this life. Then they accompanied him down to the ship" (verses 18-36).



Paul saying farewell to the elders at Ephesus

We see in the last paragraph, that it is far from wrong for God's people to show some emotions at times, even with loud weeping. This was a very emotional time for Paul and the elders of Ephesus – it was a kind of special teaching and prayer meeting if you will.

Then we again need to notice some up-front, even dogmatic words of Paul. It should be very clear that God HAS APPOINTED spiritual elders as OVERSEERS (as the Greek puts it) over the flocks of God, over the Churches of God. Not everyone in Paul's mind was an elder, and certainly not everyone was an OVERSEER over the flock. It was the duty of the elders of the flock to GUIDE and SHEPHERD the flock in faithfulness, as Paul himself had done among the church at Ephesus.

Then we also find the teaching here that it may be right and proper and the best thing to do, in that elders WORK with their skills at a SECULAR job, and maintain themselves, even as Paul said, helping others in the physical way also. We have seen as we went through the books of Corinthians, that Paul knew it was NOT wrong for those who preached the Gospel to "live off the gospel" - to be supported by those to whom they taught and preached the Gospel, supported in a physical way. This is

very clearly brought out in 1 Corinthians 9 and 2 Corinthians. Read those books in a modern translation and the truth on this point will become abundantly clear, if of course you are willing to see it.

There are times, as in the life of Paul, when it is the right and best judgment for an elder to work at a secular job as well as shepherding the flock of God. Paul found, as with the Corinthians, that some groups of the flock of God, just were not in the mindset to support him with the physical needs of life, so he gladly supported himself with the skill of being a tent maker. Then as he shows the Corinthians there were other groups of the flock who gladly helped him and his companions in the physical needs of this life.

The THIRD very important teaching of Paul in this message to the elders of Ephesus is that FALSE teachers WILL arise among the flock of God. It would seem there was nothing more sure in Paul's mind than this sad fact - false teachers would come into the flock of God, and would DEVOUR, and speak PERVERSE things (KJV) to gain a following. The one trait it seems that false teachers have is that they LOVE to be loved and to have people following them. Jesus once said to His true faithful apostles that when men shall say well of you, have you as some great "religious figure or teacher" then BEWARE, for so they did to the FALSE prophets of old.

The other startling truth that Paul gives is that MANY of these FALSE teachers will COME FROM the VERY ELDERS to whom he was speaking. Paul knew that many elders, many shepherds of the flock would GO ASTRAY, BECOME FALSE TEACHERS, SPEAKING PERVERSE THINGS. We need to fully realize that just because a person STARTS out as being called by God to be an overseer and a spiritual elder of the flock of God, DOES NOT MEAN, he automatically and irreversibly, can never become a false teacher. Paul was addressing those elders whom at THAT TIME, were true elders of the flock. Paul did not say that some WERE and HAD ALWAYS been false elders, from the word go. No, those elders were at the time Paul was speaking to them, true, faithful Elders and overseers, BUT Paul knew SOME, later, would become FALSE teachers, speaking perverse things, so they could have "a following" - "to draw away disciples after them" (KJV).

How does a person NOT fall prey to false teachers? One clear answer is found in Isaiah 8:20. Keep your nose and eyes in the Word of God, the Bible. What an important chapter is Acts 20. The teachings and lessons for us there are of major importance to our salvation.

CHAPTER 14

PAUL ARRIVES IN JERUSALEM

Acts 21

After saying farewell to the elders of Ephesus, Paul and his company sailed to the island of Cos. They reached Rhodes the next day and then went on to Patara, and there they boarded a ship sailing for the Syrian province of Phoenicia. They sighted the island of Cyprus and passed by it on the left and then landed at the harbor of Tyre, in Syria, where the cargo of the ship was unloaded. There they went ashore and found the local disciples and decided to stay a week with them. Through the power of the Holy Spirit these disciples prophesied that Paul should NOT go up to Jerusalem. When it was time for Paul and his company to leave, the entire congregation, with wives and children, came down to the shore with them. There they all knelt and prayed and said farewell. Paul and his companions journeyed on and the saints of Tyre returned to their homes (Acts 21:1-6).

We again see here an example that it is quite correct and honorable at times, for a congregation to all kneel and pray together. This was no doubt such a time, as they all knew nothing good from the physical point of view was going to happen to Paul if he went up to Jerusalem.

Paul and his co-workers went on to Ptolemais, where they greeted the believers there, but only stayed for one day. Then they went on to Caesarea and stayed in Philip's house. He had become an evangelist. He was one of the seven men chosen to "wait on tables" or distribute food, as we saw back in Acts chapter 6.

Now, Philip had four unmarried daughters who had the gift of prophecy. In the early years of the New Testament Church of God, this gift of prophecy usually included the ability to foretell what would happen to a person or persons in a week, or month, or whatever time frame. They could probably also foretell natural disasters to come. All of those kinds of things they could predict, as well as speaking things inspired by the Holy Spirit, which the word "prophecy" can also be understood to mean (verses 7-9).

We can see from this that the gifts of the Spirit can be placed upon ANYONE, men or women, and that is exactly what Paul taught in 1 Corinthians chapter 12.

We note also that the leading of the Spirit had guided Philip, who at first was chosen by the people and the apostles (Acts 6) to serve in a physical way, to become an evangelist. The details of all this happening to Philip we are not given. It is given that by this time in the life of the Church of God, he was known as an evangelist, and that is sufficient for us to know. An evangelist is one who goes out in a public way at times to proclaim the Gospel to the unconverted masses of the people.

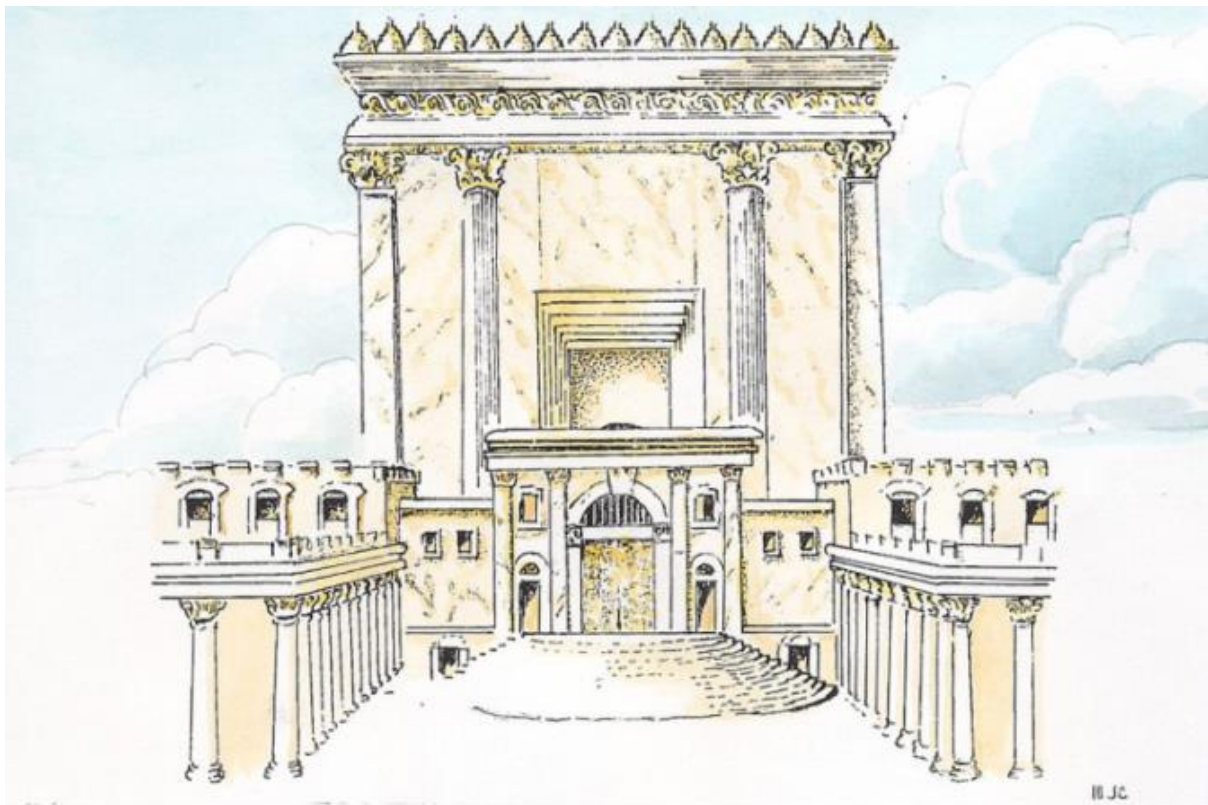
During the time Paul and his companions stay with Philip, a man named Agabus, who also had the gift of prophecy, came to them from Judea. He took Paul's belt and bound his own feet with it. Then he said, "The Holy Spirit has declared to me, that the owner of this belt shall also be bound by the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem and turned over to the Romans."

Paul's companions and those believers at Philip's house then begged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. But Paul answered them saying, "Why do you weep for me? You are breaking my heart! I am not only ready to be jailed at Jerusalem but also to die if I must, for the sake of our Lord Jesus."

All then realized it was useless to try and get Paul to change his mind about going up to Jerusalem, so they stopped trying and said, "The will of the Lord be done" (verses 10-14).

Paul Arrives At Jerusalem

Some believers from Caesarea accompanied Paul and his companions to Jerusalem. They arrived and stayed with a man named Mnason, who was originally from Cyprus, and one of the very early disciples. They were all welcomed very cordially by the believers in Jerusalem.



Paul arrived in Jerusalem desiring to keep the feast of Pentecost there (Acts 20:16)

The next day Paul and his co-workers went on to meet with James and all the elders of Jerusalem. Greetings were exchanged and then Paul gave account of all the things God had accomplished among the Gentiles through his and his companions' efforts. The elders of Jerusalem praised God on hearing all this news, but then after a little silence, with concerned looks on their faces, they all said with one voice (but probably it was James who did the speaking for them all):

"You know dear brother there are many thousands of Jews who have also believed, and still take all the laws of Moses very seriously. The Jewish Christians here have been told that you are teaching all the Jews in the Gentile world to turn away from the laws of Moses. They say that you teach people NOT to CIRCUMCISE their

children or follow Jewish customs. Now what can be done about this? For those Jewish Christians will certainly hear that you have come to Jerusalem.

"Here is our suggestion. We have four men here who have taken a vow, and are preparing to shave their heads. Go with them to the Temple and join them in the purification ceremony, and pay for them to have their heads shaved. Then everyone will know that the rumors about you and your teachings are all false and that you yourself are willing to observe Jewish laws and rituals.

"As for the Gentile Christians, all we ask of them is what we have already told them in a letter, that they should not eat food offered to idols, nor consume blood, nor eat meat from strangled animals, and that they should stay away from all sexual immorality" (verses 15-25).

This is an extremely interesting passage of the New Testament. It shows that false ideas and rumors that are incorrect, can and do often float around and get passed on, that come from a misunderstanding of what someone may say in a certain context. Often the context is not thought about, only certain words that are said, are clung to, and from there ANOTHER context is added, which perverts the original context and the words spoken within the original context.

Paul taught that certain physical rites and "rituals" (like the rite and ritual that went with circumcising an eight day old male child) such as physical circumcision was, under the New Testament, NOT required for spiritual salvation. But he NEVER taught it was WRONG or that such a law of Moses, should NOT BE DONE, if you desired to do it. He simply taught that such a physical rite did nothing for your salvation. He taught that doing a physical rite like circumcision, neither added to the grace of salvation, nor took away from the grace of salvation. In other words Paul said, you did not acquire more "brownie points" in God's eyes if you circumcised or if you did not circumcise.

We have seen (as we covered Acts 15) that SOME "Jewish" believing people taught that circumcision WAS needed in order to be saved. Many other Jewish believers also practiced the Temple rituals and vows such as the Nazarite vow of Number 6. It may well have been the Nazarite vow that these four men had taken which the elders at Jerusalem wanted Paul to participate in, at the Temple, with them, as they ended their vow.

But the context of this passage is certain - it is physical and ritual laws of Moses, which many Jewish believers, still desired to practice, even having enthusiasm to still practice them. The Temple still stood, the Levitical priesthood still functioned in the Temple. All this was instituted by God under Moses, so hence it still in that sense, belonged to the Lord. It was not NOW something "evil" or "bad" or "contaminated" just because the New Testament was in effect, and because the Messiah had now come to die for the sins of the world. Some thought that Paul did teach that the rites and rituals of the laws of Moses, including physical circumcision, was "evil" or "bad" and should be kept at arm's length, avoiding them like the plague.

The elders at Jerusalem knew Paul did NOT teach such a theology concerning the Temple ritual laws of Moses, as some thought he did. And those elders wanted Paul to literally demonstrate to all in Jerusalem that he was not against partaking in Temple rites IF they so still desired to do so.

Again, let me make it clear. Paul did not teach that a believer in Christ HAD TO partake of Temple ceremonies and rites under the New Testament. He taught that such physical rites (including physical circumcision) did NOT have to be performed under the New Testament, that those rites gained no favor or grace with God as such. You were neither "more saved" or "less saved" or to put it in modern terminology, you were neither a "better Christian" or a "worse Christian" by doing or not doing physical Temple rites of Moses.

It comes as a shock to many Christians to realize the truth of this passage in the book of Acts. The truth that Paul DID go to the Temple and with other believers did partake of performing Temple rites, which included Temple sacrifices. Many today think that as Christ had been sacrificed on the cross for the sins of the world, that doing literal animal sacrifices in the Temple, with the Levitical priesthood, would be a terrible affront to Christ, would somehow even be evil or sin, to do such a thing as what Paul and these four men did in the Temple ritual. But as we can plainly read, this was not the case at all, Paul and the four men, did go to the Temple, they did partake in Temple rituals, and God did not rain fire and brimstone down on their heads for so doing.

If today there was a Temple in Jerusalem, if today there was a Levitical priesthood officiating the Temple sacrifices and rituals, it would NOT be wrong, evil, or sin, for a Christian to partake of those rituals. It would NOT make you a better Christian, or a worse Christian, if you did or did not partake of Temple rituals. You would not find more grace or less grace with God by participating in Temple ceremonies and rituals, even Temple animal sacrifices. It was not bad or sin for Paul and the four men to participate in the Temple laws of Moses, and it would not be bad or sin, for you to do likewise IF the Temple conditions were the same today as it was in Paul's day.

As for the Gentiles, or non-Jewish people, we have the clear instruction in both Acts 15 and in this passage of Acts 21, that they were never to feel they ever needed to perform Temple rites, ceremonies, rituals, including physical circumcision. They were to particularly watch and be careful about FOUR points given. We covered all this in some detail as we went through Acts 15. It was four areas where the Gentiles had specific LARGE problems with. Most can see that of sexual immorality, being a large problem, with the people who never had God's word to guide them on the matter of sexual conduct, but the other three people could question, from the point of "Are not these also physical laws of Moses?"

Yes, I guess you could say they are to some degree, or at least many people classify them as physical laws of Moses, and so as the Temple ritual, sacrificing, ceremonial, laws of Moses are not required for salvation, so then these other three laws of Moses should not be required. But we have the elders of Jerusalem saying the Gentiles should take care NOT to defile themselves by practicing the breaking of these three laws of Moses (the fourth being accepted by most Christians as right and correct to be not sexually immoral). So, in the mind of many, there is a seeming contradiction or ideas, or teaching here.

The truth must lie then in the understanding, that NOT ALL physical laws of Moses are the SAME. Some are NOT important for Christians to practice today under the New Testament, but SOME ARE STILL to be observed by all Christians (Jews or Gentiles) today.

I did cover this aspect of the question and seeming contradiction in detail in Acts 15. I ask the reader to refer back to that section of the Bible Story, for the full answer.

Paul Is Arrested

So it was that Paul agreed to the elders' request and the next day he went through the purification ritual with the men in the Temple. Then he publicly announced the date when their vows would end and when the sacrifices would be offered for each of them.

The seven days were almost completed when some Jews from Asia saw Paul in the Temple and roused a mob of people against him. They took hold of him, saying, "Men of Israel! Help us! This is the man who teaches against our people and tells everyone to disobey the Jews' laws. He speaks against the Temple, and even defiles it by bringing into it Gentile people [They had earlier seen Paul in the city with Trophimus, the Gentile from Ephesus, and they assumed Paul had taken him to the Temple]" (verses 26-29).

Ah, see what "assumption" can do - it can cause blindness of heart to the point of wanting to do harm, literally or mentally and emotionally, towards whom you have falsely assumed has done what you consider they should not have done, even if what you consider is evil, is not evil at all. Nothing in God's word said a Gentile could not come into the Temple of God, but the Jews had set boundary markers and walls with the Temple structure to keep Gentiles in only one part and out of another part. They even had boundaries set up where Jewish women could not cross over within the Temple. All man made ideas and practices. So these Jews truly had an assumption and compounded it by adding to it practices and traditions of their own making, all ending up to bring a great evil upon the Apostle Paul.

The whole population of the city was rocked and rolled by these accusations, and a great riot broke out. Paul was dragged out of the Temple, and the gates closed behind him. They were now trying to kill him, so hot was their anger at him. Word reached the commander of the Roman regiment that all Jerusalem was in a riotous uproar. He immediately called out his officers and soldiers who ran into the crowd. And it was only this action by the soldiers that caused the mob to stop beating Paul. The commander arrested Paul and had him bound with two chains. He then asked the crowd who this man was and what had he done. Some shouted one thing and others shouted another thing. He could find no truth in all the shouting and accusations, much of it confusing and contradictory, so he ordered Paul to be taken to the fortress.

As they reached the stairs to the fortress, the mob grew so violent the soldiers had to lift up Paul to their shoulders, and carry him aloft, to protect him. The crowd followed behind shouting, "Kill him, kill him!"

Paul Speaks To The Crowd

As Paul was about to be taken inside, he said to the commander, "May I have a word with you sir?"

"Do you know Greek?" the commander surprisingly asked when Paul spoke in Greek to him. "Are you not the one, the Egyptian who led a rebellion some time back and took four thousand members of the assassins out into the desert?"

"No," replied Paul, "I am a Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia, which is an important city. Please, let me talk to these people."

The commander agreed, so Paul stood there on the steps and motioned to the people to be quiet. Soon a deep silence did come over the crowd, and he addressed them in their own language, Aramaic, which was the common Hebrew dialect of the people of Judah (verses 30-40).

CHAPTER 15

PAUL'S DEFENCE FROM THE JEWS' ACCUSATIONS

Acts 22

Finally the mob of people who were calling for Paul's death were somewhat silent in order to allow Paul to speak to them.



Paul addresses the Jewish mob on the steps leading up to Fort Antonia

"Men and my brethren and honorable fathers, hear my defence which I make unto you," Paul began to say in the Hebrew dialect to them, and as he spoke in their native language they became even more silent.

"I am truly a man who is a Jew," Paul continued, "and I was born in Tarsus, a city in the province of Cilicia, yet I was brought up in this city of Jerusalem, as a student at the feet of Gamaliel (who was one of the great Jewish teachers of that day).

"I was taught according to the perfect manner and traditions of the fathers of Judaism, and I was surely zealous towards serving God, as all of you are this day. I persecuted THIS WAY even to some dying as I hounded them down. I put many in chains and delivered both men and women into prison, both the High Priest and many Elders can bear witness to those facts.

"I received letters from the aforementioned to give to the brethren Jews at Damascus, to bring them which I had bound and chained unto Jerusalem, for to be punished. And it came to pass, that as I was on my journey to Damascus and was about there, that around noon, there was suddenly a great light from heaven around me. And I fell to the ground hearing a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' I answered, 'Who are you Lord?' And the voice said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, who you are persecuting.'

"They that were with me saw indeed the light, and were terrified, but they did not hear the voice of Him that spoke to me. And I said, 'What shall I do Lord?' And the Lord replied, 'Arise, get up, and go into Damascus, and there it shall be told you concerning all the things that are appointed for you to do.' I could not see, I was blind, from the glory of the light, and I had to be led by hand into the city of Damascus, by those who were with me.

"Then a man by the name of Ananias, a devout man according to the law of Moses, a man who had the respect of all the Jews at Damascus, he came to me, and said, 'Brother Saul, received your sight.' And within the same hour I was able to see him. And he further said to me, 'The God of our fathers has chosen you, that you should know His will, and understand the Just One, and should hear the words from His mouth. For you are to be a witness to all persons of what you have seen and heard. Now, wait no longer, get up and be baptized, and have your sins washed away, as you call on the name of the Lord.'

"And it came to pass as I was come again to Jerusalem, as I was praying in the Temple, I was in a trance, and I saw Him saying to me, 'Make haste, get out of Jerusalem quickly, for the people there will not receive your words concerning Myself.' And I said, 'Lord, they know that I had many in the synagogues who believed on you, beaten and imprisoned and when the blood of your martyr Stephen was spilled, I also stood by and consented unto his death, I was holding and watching over the clothes of those who were stoning him.' And He answered me, 'Depart, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'" (chapter 22:1-21).

At the sound of the word "Gentile" they broke their silence. Once more their angry emotions took over, and they shouted out, "Away with such a fellow as this, he should not walk this earth, it is fitting that he should not live."

They continued to cry this out and as they did so they cast off their clothes and threw dust into the air, a sign with the Jews of deep emotional upset, but the emotion in this case was anger at Paul and a desire to have him put to death (verses 22-23).

We must always guard against the bad side of our emotions. Emotions are not wrong of themselves. Our heavenly Father has all the emotions we have. This can be seen from a careful reading of the entire Bible, but our Father's emotions are always in perfect control and with righteousness. We can also see from this account that the Jews had "prejudice" - a preconceived notion or idea about something that can cause a wrong action, even a hurtful action to others.

The Jews here hated the Gentiles overall. It had become with them, not just a matter of hating many of their sins and practices, which indeed were contrary to the word, and commandments of God, but even the mention of the word "Gentile" brought

revolt and disdain and anger. The wrong side of those emotions were again manifested as they shouted out that Paul should be put to death.

The chief captain of the guards ordered that Paul should be brought inside the castle, and be whipped, to see if he might admit as to why the Jews were crying out for him to be put to death.

They were binding Paul's hands with thongs of leather, when Paul said to them, "Is it lawful to whip a man that is a Roman citizen, before a trial, to see if he should be condemned?" When the centurion (a soldier in charge of a hundred men) heard this he quickly ran off to the captain and said, "You need to be very careful with this man, for he claims he is a Roman citizen."

Then, with haste, the captain came over to Paul and said, "Tell me the truth now, is it true that you are a Roman citizen?" Paul answered, "Yes, it is indeed true, I am." The captain muttered, "Why, it is with a great sum of money that I bought this freedom of being a Roman citizen."

Yes, like today in some quarters, as they say, "With money you can buy anything." You could with enough money "buy" yourself a citizenship in the Roman Government. And with that citizenship you were entitled to many things that you could not ask for if you were not a citizen of Rome. Going through a "court" hearing before being physically punished if found guilty, was one of those things.

Paul was now claiming his rightful Roman citizen privileges of a court hearing before any physical punishment could be enacted upon him, if he was indeed guilty of a crime. The captain had acquired Roman citizenship by buying it with a great sum of money. Paul answered him on the other hand that he was BORN a Roman citizen - he was born free - with Roman citizen privileges, and one of them was that a Roman citizen could not be whipped without first a trial to see if he was guilty of something that deserved a physical beating under Roman law (verses 22-28).

Everyone now departed from Paul. They got together and talked among themselves, even now being very afraid, because the captain had bound up and was about to allow physical whipping to be administered to a Roman citizen, without first having a trial.

The next day the captain, took off the bonds from Paul's hands, set him free, but wanting to know if the Jews had a true cause in saying Paul had done some evil, he called the chief priests and the Jewish Sanhedrin (the Jewish court allowed under Roman rule to function on certain religious matters) together. He set Paul in their midst (verses 29-30).

CHAPTER 16

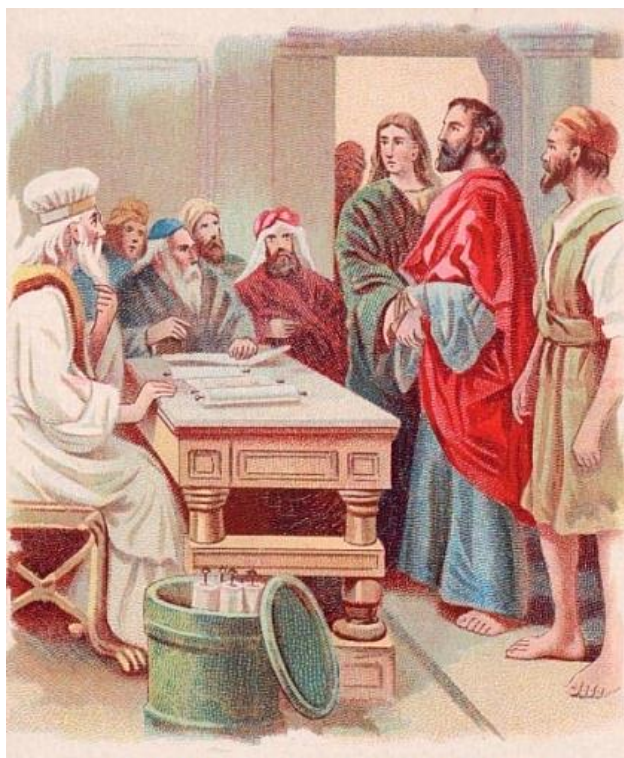
PAUL ANSWERS THE JEWISH SANHEDRIN

Acts 23

With an earnest steadfast look at the members of the Sanhedrin, Paul spoke: "Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God unto this very day."

The High Priest Ananias then commanded someone standing close to Paul to smite him on the mouth. Paul immediately said with a stern tone of voice, "God shall smite you, you whited wall [black underneath, but looking white and righteous to onlookers]. Do you sit to judge me after the law, and then command that I be smitten, which is contrary to the law?"

Those that stood by cried out to Paul, "Do you revile and speak angry to God's High Priest?"



Paul before the Jewish Sanhedrin

Then Paul said, "I did not know brethren that it was the High Priest; for it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of the ruler of your people'" (verses 1-5).

Paul is quoting Exodus 22:28. But the whole Bible must be taken into account with such a verse. When the judges and rulers are judging and ruling according to God's commandments and righteousness, then they rule and judge correctly and so must be shown respect at all times. Under the ideal of God's government they are living, acting, thinking, and administering, correct judgment, in the correct godly manner. In so doing God gave instructions, that all people then should honor the judges and rulers.

In this case with Paul, it is very clear that the High Priest and the members of the Sanhedrin, were FAR from acting and thinking and practicing according to God's righteousness. The High Priest had commanded that a physical action to be done to Paul that was indeed NOT according to any law of Moses or law of God. The High Priest was way out of line here and in the whole context of this episode with Paul. Did Paul really not know that it was the High Priest standing there? I very much doubt he did not. Paul was a highly educated man, and coming to Jerusalem, being there for a while, going through all the trouble he was experiencing with the Jews, I would fully expect that Paul knew very well who was High Priest.

Did Paul have a right to protest, even with no uncertain words, against the High Priest's command to have him stricken on the mouth. Yes, of course he did.

Nowhere in God's word does the Lord teach that "evil" men, who are NOT fulfilling their function as supposedly being a judge and ruler in righteousness for God, over His people, must be respected no matter how they behave and no matter what commandments they broadcast out to others to perform against righteous individuals (and Paul was certainly in full and right standing with God here, it was the High Priest and the members of the Sanhedrin who were opposed to the Lord here, and it was they who were really in the hot seat with God, not Paul).

Jesus spoke at times with very open and frank words to "religious leaders" of His day, who were anything but the correct righteous judges and rulers of religion in Israel. Once more just read Matthew chapter 23 and hear the blistering words from Jesus' mouth to religious judges and rulers, which would have included the High Priest and the members of the Jewish religious council of the Sanhedrin.

So, what of Paul kind of apologizing here, and saying "I did not know it was the High Priest" and quoting from Exodus 22:28? He was probably saying it with tongue in cheek, kind of "appeasing" them we could say. They were so far off from acting the truth, that they even thought the High Priest had the right from God to command anything, even that which was against the law of God, and that it was approved of God.

Yes, Paul I'm sure knew it was the High Priest commanding something to be done which was against the law of God, but when they wanted to abuse Exodus 22:28 as if no matter what the judge or ruler of the people commanded against you, you were to take it like "blind faith dogs" - then Paul appeased them with a kind of tongue in cheek, "Oh, I'm so sorry, for I know what Exodus 22:28 says." Probably under his breath he was saying, "but you guys are so far from following the righteous way and laws of God, you don't even come within acting as God commanded judges and rulers to act."

Many sects and cults, mis-apply this verse of Exodus 22:28. They first, through various cunning ways get their followers to believe the leader of the cult and his right hand men, are true "prophets" or "apostles" or "ministers" of God, usually the "head" leader is "THE prophet or apostle" of God. Then they brainwash their followers to believe that anything done, spoken, or written, by the "head" apostle is THE WORD of God, directly coming from God, inspired by the Lord, even when it is in utter CONTRAST and opposition to the laws and commandments and teachings of the Lord in His word the Bible.

If someone then questions the correctness of "THE apostle" of the cult, as not in accordance to God's word in the Bible, the cult leaders throw Exodus 22:28 in their face. How many cult leaders finally reach the point when they tell their followers that THEY, the leader, are ABOVE the law, have new revelation supposedly from God, that makes the written word of God obsolete at times, is just about ALWAYS the case. Then they want you to blindly obey Exodus 22:28. The reasoning goes in a circle. We are God's judges and rulers, hence we can set whatever we want to command and set as law, be it against God's law or not, and you have to take it and say nothing, for Exodus 22:28 tells you to respect us.

They want you to look at the Bible with tunnel vision and fall in line with their reason of circulation. They fail to realize and certainly fail to teach that the Bible often

speaks with "general statements" and general statements have an exception side to them.

The "whole world" came to be taxed in Luke 2:1. Obviously this is a general statement. The people in Argentina or China, or India, did NOT come to Jerusalem to be "taxed." So it is with Exodus 22:28. The understanding from this general statement, as expounded in the whole Bible, is that when judges and rulers are acting in accordance to God's will and ways and laws, then respect is to be shown to them if they are not, but acting contrary to God's laws, then the verse does not apply.

People did not have to respect or give honor or obedience to Adolf Hitler of the 20th century. Nor did they have to keep their mouth shut or their pen from writing about the wrongs and the evils of that leader.

Paul now goes on to use common wisdom of the world, even what we might say "psychology" on the people in the Sanhedrin before him.

He perceived that one part of the Sanhedrin were Pharisees and the other part were Sadducees. He tells them that he was a Pharisee at one time, the very son of a Pharisee. And that it is the hope of the RESURRECTION of the dead that he is called into question over. Oh, what psychology he used, for when he came from that point in his defence, with the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, he knew it would cause quite a commotion. For The Pharisees BELIEVED in the resurrection of the dead, but the Sadducees DID NOT! They, the Sadducees also did not believe in angels or spirits, but the Pharisees believed in both.

There was quite the cry raised up, the scribes from the Pharisees section of the Sanhedrin, rose and said they found NO EVIL in Paul, but that if it was a spirit or an angel speaking to him, they did not want to fight against God.

A mighty tug-of-war broke out between the two rival fractions of the Jewish Sanhedrin, so much so that it looked like Paul would literally be torn apart between them. So the captain ordered his soldiers to go down and take hold of Paul by force and bring him back into the fortress.

That night the Lord stood by Paul and said, "Be of good comfort, Paul, for you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so must you also witness about me in Rome" (verses 6-11).

Plot To Kill Paul Is Discovered

The anger some Jews (about 40 of them) had for Paul was so intense that some actually banded together and put themselves under a curse, or a vow, that they would neither eat food or drink water till they had killed Paul.

We know that if they stuck to this vow, they themselves ended up dying, for Paul was not to be killed by the hands of them or the Jews of the Sanhedrin.

This band of 40 Jews went to the Sanhedrin, told them what vow they had put themselves under, and wanted the Sanhedrin to tell the captain in the fortress to

bring Paul to them, as if wanting to question him more. Then the 40 Jews would jump on Paul and kill him.

This plan became known to Paul's sister's son (yes Paul has a sister living in Jerusalem) and he went into the fortress and was able to tell Paul about it.

Paul was allowed to appear before the captain of the soldiers with this young man who had told him the secret plan of the forty Jews. The captain took the young man off privately and asked him what he had to say. He told him that the Jews were going to ask him to bring Paul to them so they could ask him more questions, but the forty would jump on him and kill him.

The chief captain thanked the young man for bringing him the news of this plan, and told him to tell no one that he had told the captain about it (verses 12-22).

The captain ordered two centurions to gather together two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen, two hundred spearmen, and horses for all, and at the third hour of the night, to escort Paul to Felix the governor at Caesarea.

He wrote a letter after this manner:

"Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix, greeting. This man Paul was taken by the Jews and should have been killed by them; then came I with an army, and rescued him, having understood he was a Roman citizen. I wanted to know the cause as to why the Jews wanted him dead. I perceived it was all to do with their law, and nothing worthy of death or even of being bound up and imprisoned. I was also informed how the Jews had contrived a plan to kill this man, so I've straight away sent him to you. I have informed the Jews they need to go before you to state what they have against this man Paul, Farewell."

The soldiers did as they were commanded and brought Paul during the night to Antipatris. On the morrow they left just the horsemen to accompany Paul, and they returned to the castle. The horsemen arrived at Caesarea and delivered the letter and Paul before Felix.

Felix read the letter from Claudius, and asked Paul what Province he was from, and was told Cilicia.

Felix told Paul he would hear him give his defence when his accusers arrived. Until then Paul was to be housed in Herod's judgment hall, a very fine and hospitable confinement (verses 23-35).

Acts 24

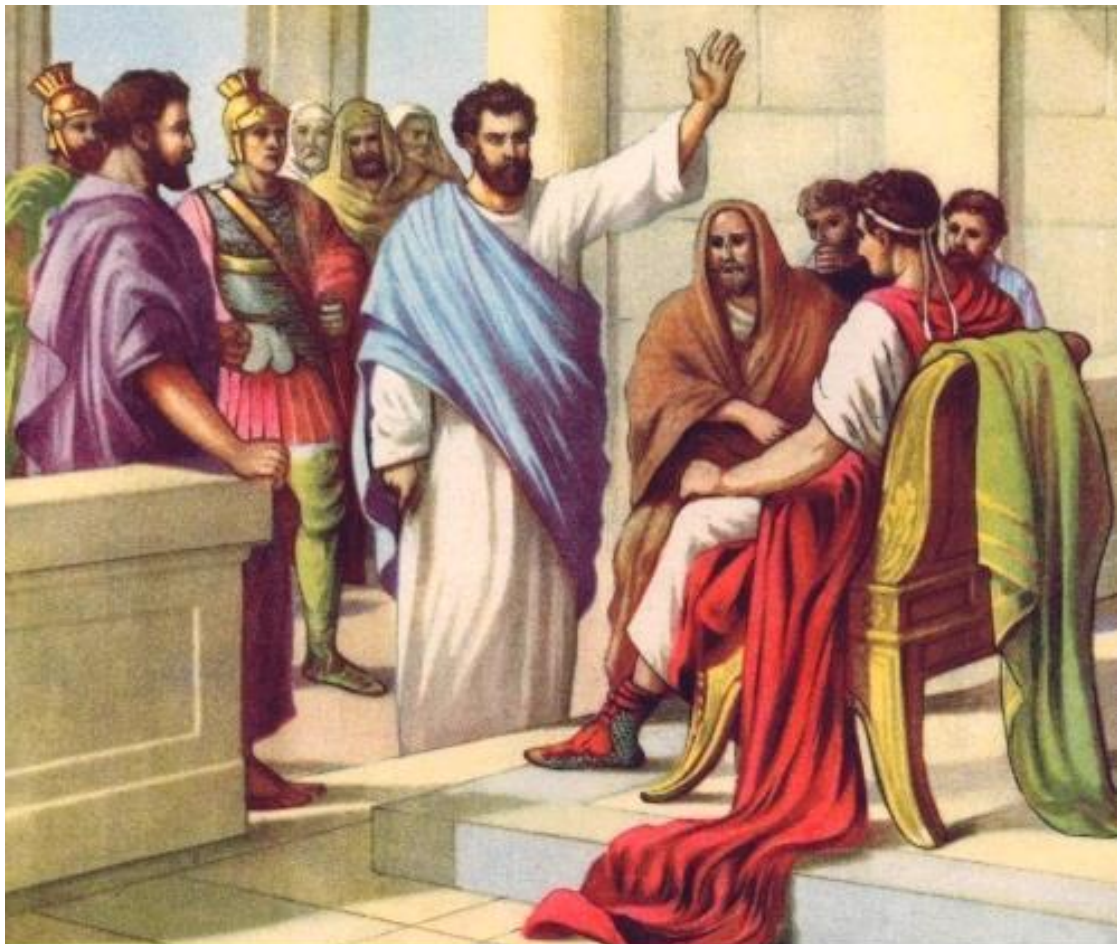
Felix the governor would hear the case against Paul when his accusers arrived. Till then Paul was imprisoned at Herod's headquarters.

Five days later Ananias, the High Priest arrived with some of the Jewish elders and an orator, by the name of Tertullus, to press charges against Paul. They stated to Felix (through the orator they had with them):

"Your Excellency, you have given much peace to the Jews and have enacted reforms for us, to have this peace. For that we are most grateful to you (during that time in the first century the Roman government gave the Jews all the freedom they needed to practice their religious faith). But not to bore you, please give me your attention for a short time, as I outline our case against this man Paul. We have found him to be a trouble maker, a man who is constantly inciting the Jews throughout the Roman world, to riots and rebellions against the Roman government. He is a ringleader of a sect known as the Nazarenes. Furthermore he was trying to defile the Temple when we arrested him (Some manuscripts of the New Testament add; 'We would have judged him by our law, but Lysias, the commander of the garrison, came and took him violently away from us, commanding his accusers to come before you.'). You can find this truth of our accusations by examining him yourself"

Then the other Jews spoke up and said all that Tertullus said was true (verses 1-9).

Now Paul was given a turn to speak. The governor motioned to him to stand up and speak. Paul said:



Paul speaks before the Roman Governor

"I know, sir, that you have been a judge of Jewish affairs for many years, and so this indeed gives me confidence as I speak to you in my defense. You can soon discover that it was no more than twelve days ago that I arrived in Jerusalem to worship at the Temple. I did not argue with anyone in the Temple, nor did I incite a riot in any synagogue, or on the streets of the city.

"These men from Jerusalem cannot prove anything that they accuse me of doing. But I do admit that I follow THE WAY, which they call a sect. I worship the God of our ancestors, and I firmly believe all the words written in the prophets in God's Scriptures given to us Jews. I have hope in God, just like these men do, that He will raise both the righteous and the ungodly. Because of this, I always try to maintain a clear conscience before God and before everyone else. After several years away, I returned to Jerusalem with money and goods to aid my people and to offer sacrifices to God. My accusers saw me in the Temple as I was completing a purification ritual. There was no crowd around me and there was no rioting. But some Jews from the province of Asia were there - and they really should be here to bring charges against me if they have anything to charge me with. Ask these Jews here what wrongdoing the Jewish Sanhedrin court found in me, except for one thing I said when I shouted out, 'I am on trial before you today because I believe in the RESURRECTION of the DEAD'" (verses 10-21).

Felix, who was actually quite familiar with THE WAY (though we are not told by Luke how he was familiar with the group following and teaching the about the Lord Jesus), adjourned the hearing and said, "Wait until Lysias, the garrison commander arrives, then I will decide the case." He ordered an officer to keep Paul in custody but to give him some freedom and allow his friends to visit him and take care of his needs (verses 22-23).

Judean Governors

Name	Reign	Category
Herod Archelaus	4 BC-6 AD	King of Judaea
Coponius	6-9	Roman Prefect
Marcus Ambivulus	9-12	Roman Prefect
Annius Rufus	12-15	Roman Prefect
Valerius Gratus	15-26	Roman Prefect
Pontius Pilate	26-36	Roman Prefect
Marcellus	36-37	Roman Prefect
Marullus	37-41	Roman Prefect
Herod Agrippa I	41-44	King of Judaea
Cuspius Fadus	44-46	Roman Procurator
Tiberius Julius Alexander	46-48	Roman Procurator
Ventidius Cumanus	48-52	Roman Procurator
Marcus Antonius Felix	52-60	Roman Procurator
Porcius Festus	60-62	Roman Procurator

Matt. 2:22

Matt. 27:2

Acts 12

Acts 23-24

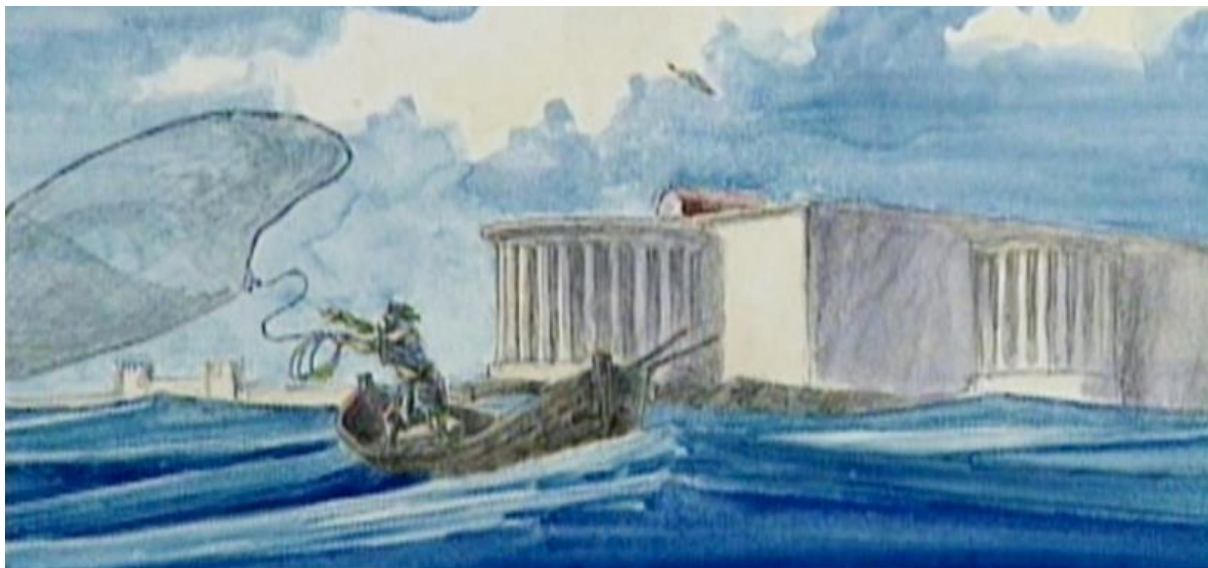
Acts 25-26

A few days later Felix came with his wife, Drusilla, who was Jewish. Sending for Paul, they listened as he told them about faith in Christ Jesus. As Paul reasoned with them about righteousness and self-control and the judgment to come, Felix became quite upset and fearful. "Go away for now Paul, when it is more convenient, I'll call for you again," said Felix.

Felix was also hoping Paul would try to bribe him and buy his freedom, so he sent for him on a regular basis and talked with him. Two years went by in this way, Paul coming before Felix, but then Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus. As Felix wanted to gain favor with the Jewish leaders, he left Paul in custody, a type of imprisonment, until Festus arrived to take over from him (verses 22-27).

Acts 25

Three days after Festus arrived in Caesarea to take over his duties from Felix, he left for Jerusalem, where the leading Jewish priests and elders met with him and made their accusations once more against Paul. They asked Festus to do them a favor and transfer Paul back to Jerusalem (they actually had planned to ambush Paul on his way back and kill him). But Festus replied that Paul was at Caesarea and he would be returning there himself soon. So he told them, "Those of you in authority can return with me. If Paul has done anything wrong, you can make your case against him" (verses 1-5).



The governor's palace at Caesarea where Paul spoke to Felix and Festus, Agrippa and Bernice

It was about eight or ten days later that Festus did return to Caesarea, and on the day after he arrived back, Paul's trial began. When Paul was in court, the Jewish leaders from Jerusalem made all kinds of serious accusations against Paul, which they simply could not prove.

Paul denied all the charges, and said, "I am not guilty. I have committed no crime against the Jewish law or the Temple or the Roman government."

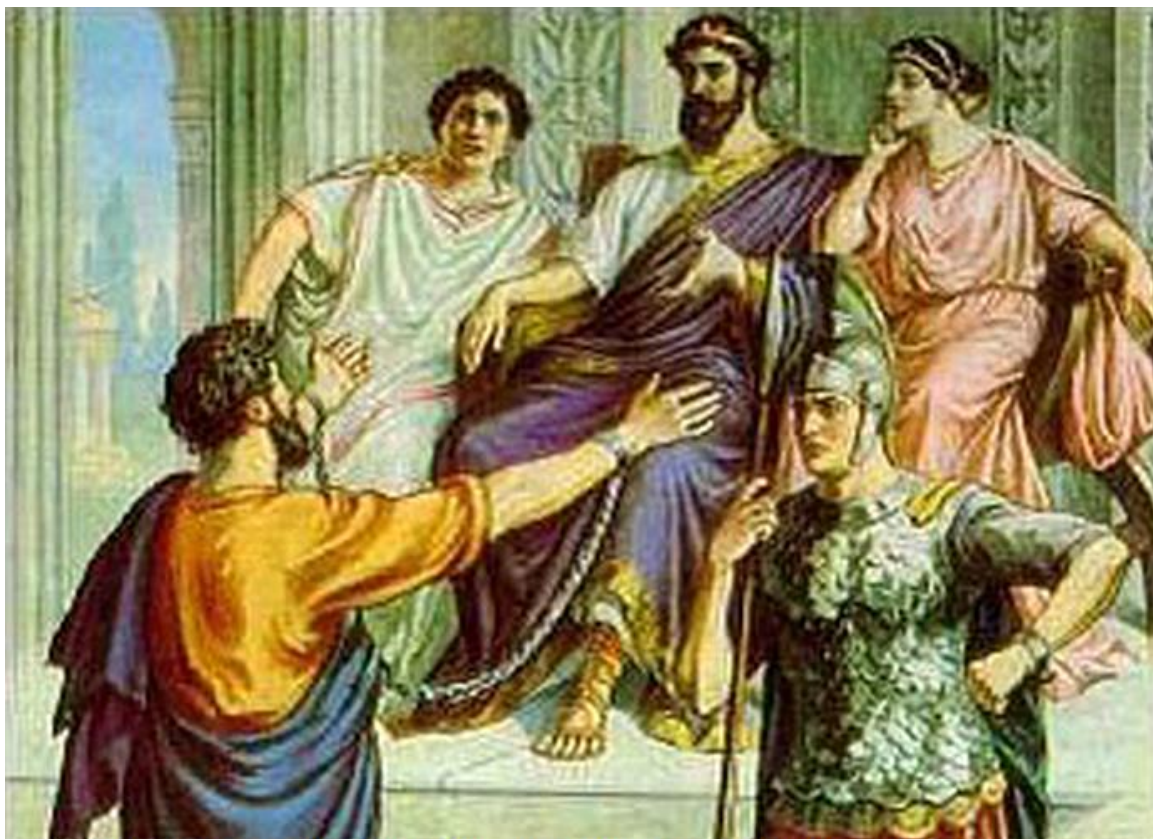
Then Festus, who wanted to try and please the Jews, asked Paul, "Are you willing to go to Jerusalem and stand trial before me there?"

Paul replied, "No! I am not! This is an official Roman court, so I ought to be tried right here. You know very well that I am not guilty. If I have done something worthy of death, I will not refuse to die. But if I am innocent, neither you or anyone else has the right to turn me over to these men to kill me. I appeal to Caesar!"

Festus then conferred with his advisers and then replied, "Very well then Paul. You have appealed to Caesar, and to Caesar you shall be sent" (verses 6-12).

It was a few days later that king Agrippa arrived with Bernice, to pay their tribute to Festus. During their stay of several days Festus discussed Paul's case with the king. "There is a prisoner here," he told him, "whose case was left for me by Felix. When I was in Jerusalem, the leading priests and other Jewish leaders accused him of many evils and wanted me to sentence him. Of course I quickly pointed out to them that Roman law does not convict people without a trial. They are given an opportunity to defend themselves face to face with their accusers. When they came here for the trial, I called the case the very next day and ordered Paul to be brought in. But the accusation made against him were not the accusations I expected at all. It was all about their religion and some fellow named Jesus, who died, but whom Paul insists is alive. I was perplexed as to how to conduct an investigation of this kind, and I asked him if he would be willing to stand trial in Jerusalem. But Paul appealed to the Emperor. So I ordered him back to jail until I could arrange to send him to Caesar."

Agrippa was by now very curious about the whole situation and about this man called Paul and the man he preached about called Jesus. "I'd like to hear this man Paul," Agrippa said to Festus. "Very well then, you certain shall. I will have him brought to us tomorrow," was Festus' reply (verses 13-22).



Paul addresses the Roman governor Festus, Herod Agrippa II and Bernice

Paul Speaks To Agrippa

The next day Agrippa and Bernice arrived at the auditorium with great pomp, accompanied by military officers and prominent men of the city. Festus ordered Paul to be brought in. Then Festus said, "King Agrippa and all present, this is the man whose death is demanded both by the local Jews and by those in Jerusalem. But in my opinion he has done nothing worthy of death. However he has appealed his case to the Emperor and I have decided to send him. But what shall I write to the Emperor? for there is no real charge against him. So I have brought him before you all, and especially before you king Agrippa, so that after we have heard from him, I might have something to write. For it does not seem reasonable to send a prisoner to the Emperor without specifying the charges against him" (verses 23-27).

Herod Agrippa II

- ☐ He was the **son of the Herod Agrippa I** who died for not giving God the glory (**Acts 12:21-23**).
- ☐ One of his sisters was **Drusilla**, the 2nd wife of **Felix**.
- ☐ He ruled the area to the east of the Sea of Galilee **from 53 AD**.
- ☐ **He and his other sister Bernice** along with the governor **Festus** heard Paul speak at **Caesarea** before he was sent to Rome (**Acts 25-26**).

Acts 26

Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You may speak now in your defense." So Paul, with a gesture of his hand started his defence:

"I am fortunate, King Agrippa, that you are the one hearing my defense against all these accusations made by the Jewish leaders, for I know you are an expert on Jewish customs and controversies. Now I ask that you listen to me patiently. As the Jewish leaders are aware, I was given a thorough Jewish training from my earliest childhood among my own people and in Jerusalem. If they would admit it, they know I have been a member of the strict Pharisees sect of our religion. Now I am on trial because I look forward to the fulfillment of God's promises made to our ancestors. In fact that is why the twelve tribes of Israel worship God night and day, for they share the same hope I have. Yet, king, they say it is wrong for me to have this hope! Why should it seem incredible to any of you that God should raise the dead?

"I once believed that I should do everything I could to oppose the followers of Jesus of Nazareth. Authorized by the leading priests, I caused many of the believers in Jerusalem to be sent to prison. And I cast my vote against them when they were condemned to death. Many times I had them whipped in the synagogues to try to get

them to curse this Christ man they believed in and preached. I was so violently opposed to them that I even hounded them in distant cities of foreign lands.

"One day I was on such a mission to Damascus, armed with authority and commission from the leading priests. It was about noon time, your Majesty, and a light from heaven brighter than the sun shone down on me and my companions. We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard to fight against my will.' 'Who are you, sir,' I asked. And the Lord replied, 'I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting. Now stand up! For I have come to you to appoint you as my servant and my witness. You are to tell the world about this experience and about other times I will appear to you. And I will protect you from both your own people and the Gentiles. Yes, I am going to send you to the Gentiles, to open their eyes that they may turn from darkness to the light, and from the power of Satan to God. Then they will receive the forgiveness for their sins and be given a place among God's people, who are sent apart by faith in me.'

"And so, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to that vision from heaven. I preached first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that all must turn from their sins and turn back to God - and prove they have changed by the good things they do. Some of the Jews arrested me in the Temple for preaching this and they even tried to kill me. But God has protected me so that I am still alive today to tell these facts to everyone from the least to the greatest. I teach nothing except what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass - that the Messiah would suffer and be the very first to rise from the dead, as a light to the Jews and to the Gentiles, alike" (verses 1-23).

When Paul said Jesus was the first to rise from the dead, he was meaning that Jesus was the first human to ever gain eternal life in glorious immortality. Not one other human as ever be raised to immortality. No not Enoch, not Moses, not Elijah, not any other human. That is made clear in Hebrews 11, where we are told that all of God's children from the beginning have died, and they are yet to be made perfect or given immortal glorious perfect life. Jesus, Paul said in his writings, has PRE-EMINENCE in ALL things, and one of those all things, is the first human to gain everlasting immortal life.

It was at this point in Paul's speech that Festus shouted out with anger, "Paul, you are insane! Too much study has made you a crazy man!"

But Paul replied, "No, I am not insane, Most Excellent Festus, I am speaking the truth soberly. And King Agrippa knows about these things. I speak frankly, for I am sure all these events are familiar to him, for they were not done in a secret corner! King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do..."

King Agrippa interrupted Paul, "Do you think you can make me a Christian so quickly? A little more of your arguments and you would probably make me a Christian I think."

Paul cried out at these words from Agrippa, "Whether quickly or not, I pray to God that both you and everyone here in this audience might become the same as I except with no chains, as I have at this time."

Then the king, the governor, Bernice, and all the others stood and left. As they talked it over they agreed, "This man has not done anything worthy of death or imprisonment."

And it was Agrippa who said, "He could be set free if he had not appealed to Caesar" (verse 24-32).

CHAPTER 17

PAUL TRAVELS TO ROME

Acts 27

When it was time Paul and other prisoners set sail for Rome. They were placed in the custody of an army officer named Julius, a captain of the Imperial Regiment. As well as Paul there were some of his companions who chose also to go with him to Rome. Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica, was also with them, as Luke wrote. They left on a boat whose home port was Adramyttium; it was scheduled to make several stops at ports along the coast of the province of Asia (verses 1-2).

The next day after setting sail they docked at Sidon. Julius was very kind and let Paul go ashore to visit with his friends and so they could provide for his needs. We are not told what those needs were.

Putting out to sea from there they encountered headwinds that made it very difficult to keep the ship on course, so they sailed north of Cyprus between that Island and the mainland. They passed along the coast of the Province of Cilicia and Pamphylia, landing at Myra, in the Province of Lycia. There the officer found an Egyptian ship from Alexandria that was bound for Italy and he put Paul and his companions on board it.



There were several days of rough sailing and only after some difficulty did they arrive near Cnidus. The wind was against them so the ship sailed down to the leeward side of Crete, past the cape of Salmone. They struggled along the coast with much effort and difficulty but finally arrived at Fair Havens, near the city of Lasea. They had lost a lot of time. Now the weather was becoming out and out dangerous for long

voyages by then, for it was just after the FAST of the day of Atonement (which was usually either in September or October on the Roman calendar).

Paul spoke to the ship's captain, "Sir," he said, "I believe there is trouble ahead if we continue on - it will be shipwreck, loss of cargo, injuries, and danger to our very lives." But the officer in charge of the prisoners listened more to the ship's captain and owner than to Paul. And since Fair Haven was an exposed harbor - a poor place to spend the winter - most of the crew wanted to go to Phoenix, which was farther up the coast of Crete, and spend the winter there. Phoenix was a good harbor with only a southwest and northwest exposure to the winter elements (verses 3-12).

The Storm At Sea

When a light wind began to blow from the south, the sailors thought they could make it with no trouble, so they pulled up anchor and sailed along the coast shore. But then the weather changed abruptly, and a wind of typhoon strength (a "northeaster" they call it) caught the ship and blew it out to sea. They could not turn the ship into the wind, so they gave up and let it run before the storm. They sailed behind a small island named Cauda, where with great difficulty they hauled aboard the life boat they were towing behind the ship. Then they banded the ship with ropes to strengthen the hull, like putting a bandage around our ankle to strengthen our feet and legs. The sailors were afraid of being driven across to the sandbars of Syrtis off the African coast, so they lowered the sea anchor and were by this means driven before the wind.

The next day, as gale force winds continued to batter the ship, the crew began to throw overboard much of the cargo. The day following they even threw out the ship's equipment of various kinds and a lot of anything else they could lay their hands on. The mighty storm raged unabated for many days, blotting out the sight of the sun and the stars, until at last nearly everyone had lost all hope of living through that storm.

No one had eaten for a long time, too anxious and scared they were. Finally Paul called the crew together and said, "Men, you should have listened to me in the first place and not left Fair Haven. You would have avoided all this injury and loss. But take courage, None of you will die, even though the ship will go down. For last night an angel of the Lord to whom I belong and to whom I serve, stood beside me, and he said, 'Don't be afraid Paul, for you will surely stand trial before Caesar. What's more, God in His goodness has granted safety to everyone sailing with you.' So, take courage! For I believe God. It will be just as He said. But we will be shipwrecked on an island" (verses 13-26).

The Shipwreck

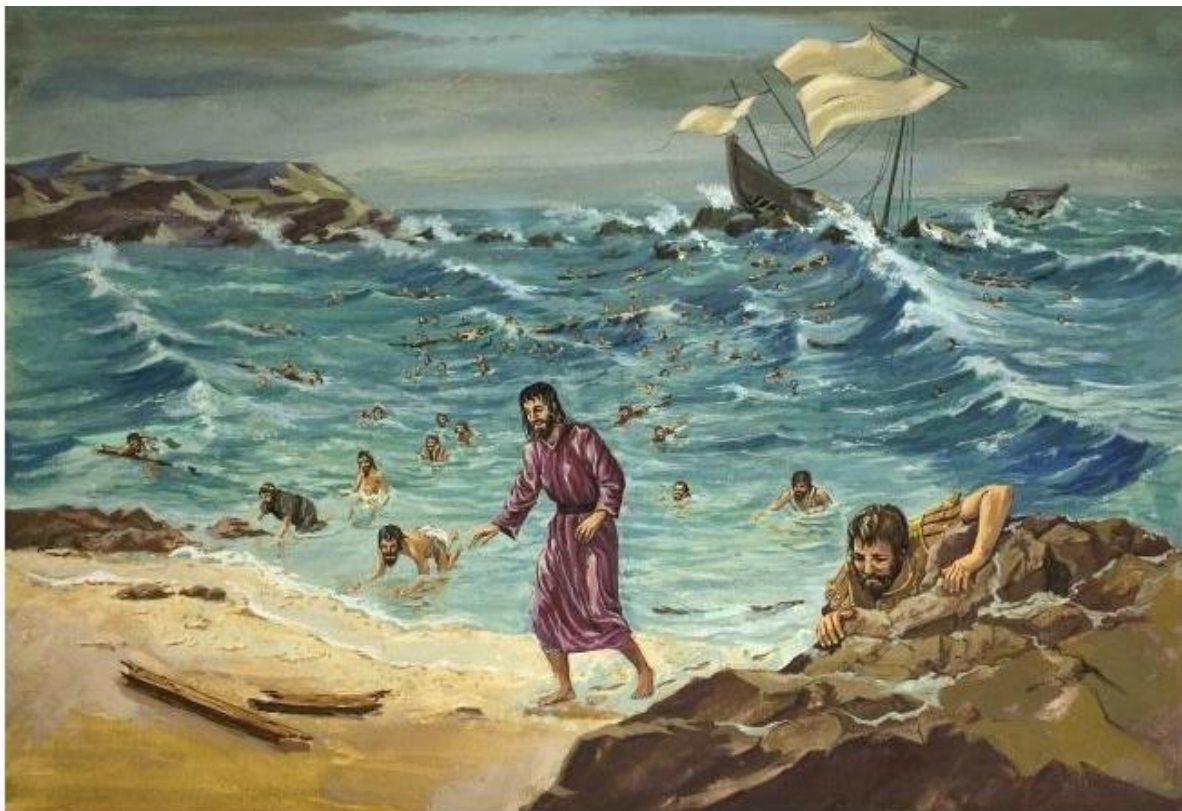
About midnight on the fourteenth night of the storm, as they were being driven across the Sea of Adria (in the central Mediterranean, not to be confused with the Adriatic Sea), the sailors sensed land was not near. They took soundings and found the sea was about 120 feet deep. A little later they sounded again and found the sea was 90 feet deep (Yes, they had some kind of sounding equipment back then to discover the depth of the sea - a lot more modern in those days than many would like to think). At that rate of movement they were afraid they would be soon driven onto the rocks near the shore, so they threw out four anchors from the stern of the

ship and prayed for daylight. Then the sailors tried to abandon the ship, they lowered the lifeboat as though they were going to put out anchors. But Paul shouted out to the commanding officer and the soldiers, "You will all die unless the sailors stay aboard." By this time they were willing to listen to Paul, so they cut the ropes and let the lifeboat fall off into the raging sea.

As the darkness gave way to the early morning light, Paul begged everyone to eat. "You haven't touched food for two weeks," he said, "Please eat something now for the good of your health. For not a hair of your head will perish."

Then he took bread and gave thanks to God, broke off a piece and ate it. Everyone was then encouraged, and all 276 of the people aboard the ship began eating. It is interesting how Luke gives us the exact number of people on the ship, why he does so is not told to us, then again a writer relating a story does add fine details as times with no other reason than to make the retelling of the story a little more personal and interesting.

After they had eaten the crew further lightened the ship by throwing overboard the cargo of wheat. When morning dawned, they did not recognize the coastline, but they did see a bay with a beach and wondered if they could get between the rocks and get the ship safely to shore. They cut off all the anchors and let them drop into the sea. Then they lowered the rudders, raised the foresail, and headed towards the shore. But the ship hit a shoal and ran aground. The bow of the ship stuck fast, while the stern was repeatedly smashed by the force of the waves and so began to break apart.



When the ship broke up some swam to shore and others clung to boards and parts of the ship.

The soldiers wanted to kill the prisoners to make sure they did not swim ashore and escape, but the commanding officer wanted to spare the life of Paul so he did not allow them to carry out their plan. Then he ordered all who could swim to jump overboard first and head for land. He told the others who could not swim to try and head for land on planks of wood or other debris from the broken ship.

It was as Paul had told them, all made it safely to land, not one person lost their life (verses 27-44).

Acts 28

Paul on the Island of Malta

Once all were safe on shore, they learned they were on the island of Malta. The people of the island were very kind to them. It was cold and rainy, so they built a fire on the shore to welcome them and to warm them.

As Paul was gathering an armful of sticks for the fire, a poisonous snake, driven out by the heat, took hold of Paul's hand. The people of the island saw it hanging there and said to each other, "He must be a murderer no doubt, though he escaped the sea, justice will not permit him to live." But Paul shook off the snake into the fire and was completely unharmed. The people all waited for him to swell up or drop dead, but when after a long time he did neither, and was not harmed in any way, they changed their minds and decided Paul must be a god (verses 1-6).



A viper came out because of the heat, and fastened on Paul's hand, but he did not die.

Jesus you will remember in the Gospels had said that sometimes His followers would be miraculously saved from death if bitten by poisonous snakes. This does not mean you deliberately go out and seek poisonous snakes and have them bite you. You will also remember Jesus said to Satan the Devil when Satan tried to tempt Jesus to throw Himself off the Temple pinnacle (the Devil quoting Scripture that God would send an angel "lest you dash your foot against a stone"), that "you shall not tempt the Lord your God." We should never put ourselves deliberately in harm's way just to try to prove God will save us. If we deliberately do this it could very well be that God will NOT step in and save us. We should not tempt God, as Jesus said. But in this particular case with Paul, he was not trying to tempt God, it was an unexpected snake bite that Paul encountered, and God did intervene and worked a miracle, so Paul was not harmed in any way.

Luke does not tell us about what Paul did about the situation of the natives of the island now thinking Paul was a god. But from other accounts in the book of Acts we can be assured Paul would have told them he was in no way "a god" but that he was in fact a servant of the one true God. I'm sure this incident would have given Paul an opportunity to have preached the Gospel of Christ and the Kingdom of God to them all.

Near the shore where they landed was an estate belonging to Publius, the chief official of the island. He welcomed them very courteously and gave them food for three days. As it happened Publius' father was ill with fever and dysentery. Paul went in and prayed for him, and laying his hands on him, he was healed. Then it was not long before all the sick on the island came to Paul and they were indeed all healed. As a result they were all showered with great honors, and when it came time to sail away from there, all the people put on board the ship many things they needed for the onward trip (verses 7-10).

Paul Arrives In Rome

It was three months after the shipwreck that they sailed away on another ship that had wintered in the island - an Alexandrian ship with the twin gods as its figurehead (those gods were the Roman gods "Castor" and "Pollux").

The first stop was at Syracuse (on the island of Sicily) and they stayed for three days. From there they sailed across to Rhegium (on the southern tip of Italy). A day later a south wind began to blow, the day after that they sailed up the coast to Puteoli. There they found some Christian believers, who invited them to stay with them for seven days. Then after that they arrived in Rome (verses 11-14).

The believers in Rome had heard they were coming and so came to meet them at the Forum (which was about 43 miles from the city of Rome) on the Appian Way. Others joined them at The Three Taverns (about 35 miles from Rome). When Paul saw all the believers he thanked God and took courage. When Paul and his companions arrived in Rome, Paul was permitted to have his own private lodging, though he was still guarded by a soldier (verses 15-16).

Paul Preaches At Rome

Three days after Paul's arrival in Rome, he called together the local Jewish leaders. He said to them, "Brothers, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the

Roman Government, even though I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our ancestors. The Romans tried me and wanted to release me, for they found I had done nothing worthy of death. But when the Jewish leaders protested the decision, I felt it was necessary to appeal to Caesar, even though I had no desire to press charges against my own people. I asked you to come here today so we could get acquainted, and to tell you that I am bound with this chain because I believe that the hope of Israel - the Messiah - has already come."

The Jewish leaders replied, "We have heard nothing against you. We have had no letters from Judea or any report from anyone who has arrived here. So we do want to hear what you have to say and what you believe. Yet, we do know that this sect of Christians is everywhere denounced by many."

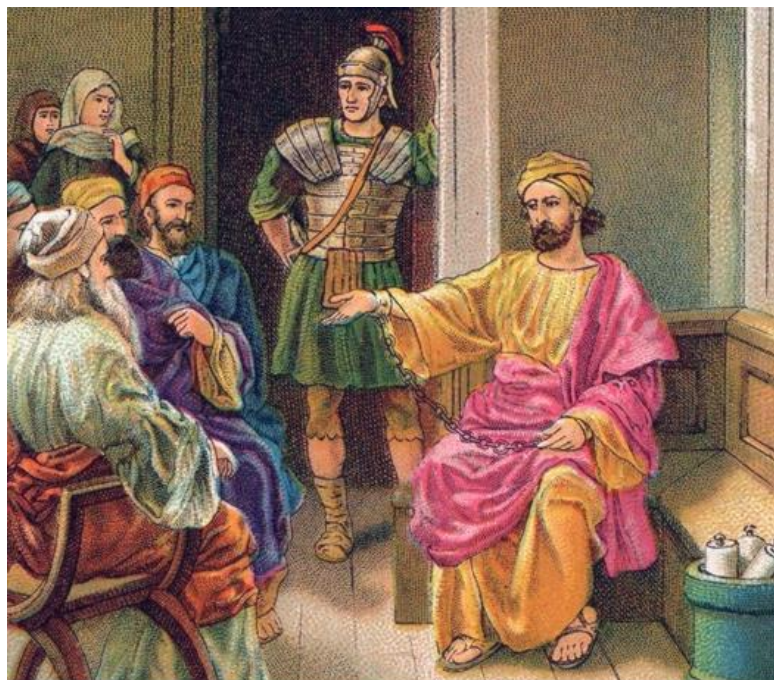
So a time was set, and on that day a large number of people came to Paul's house. He told them about the Kingdom of God and taught them about Jesus from the Scriptures - from the five books of Moses and the books of the prophets.

He began lecturing and teaching in the morning and went on into the evening. Some indeed came to believe and some did not. But after they had argued back and forth among themselves, they left with this final word from Paul:

"The Holy Spirit was right when he said to our ancestors through Isaiah the prophet: 'Go and say to my people, You will hear my words, but you will not understand; you will see what I do, but will not perceive its meaning. For the hearts of this people are waxed hard, and their ears cannot hear, and they have closed their eyes, and cannot see. Their ears cannot hear and their hearts cannot understand. They cannot turn to me and let me heal them' (Isaiah 28:26-27). So I want you to realize that this salvation from God is also available to the Gentiles, and they indeed will accept it."

Some manuscripts add after these words from Paul to the Jewish people, "And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, greatly disagreeing with each other."

For the next two years, Paul lived in his own rented house at his own expense. He welcomed all who visited him, teaching and proclaiming the Kingdom of God with all boldness and teaching all about the Lord Jesus Christ. And no person tried to stop him (verses 17-31).



Paul preaches in Rome

So ends the Book of Acts.

It may seem strange to us that Luke abruptly closes his writing of the book of Acts. There are probably good reasons why God inspired him to write no more. But whatever questions we have on the matter will have to wait until our Lord Jesus returns, then they will all be answered.

Several of the epistles that Paul wrote are believed to have been written while he was in the city of Rome, at this juncture of his life. In what we believe to be the chronological order Paul wrote Philemon, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus and Hebrews during his stay in Rome.

Next we shall look at the other letters written by James, Peter, John and Jude. We shall give you some interesting history that shows where the twelve apostles travelled to in presenting the Gospel to the lost sheep of the House of Israel, as Jesus told them to do, before He returned to the Father in heaven.

After covering the general epistles of James, Peter, John and Jude we shall then cover the wonderful deeper truths in the epistles of Paul.

Lastly, I will expound to you the truths of the great prophetic book of Revelation.

EDITOR'S NOTES:

As extra background to the story of the book of Acts I would like to conclude this section of the New Testament Bible Story before Keith moves on to cover the general epistles by quoting an old article by Herman Hoeh and John Keyser entitled "Where did the 12 Apostles Go?" which not only covers where the original 12 apostles went to but also the apostle Paul after he was released from Rome following his trial when he appealed to Caesar.

"WHERE DID THE 12 APOSTLES GO?"

WHEN Paul preached the gospel at Rome, where was Peter? Why is the Book of Acts strangely silent about the twelve apostles after their departure from Palestine? Here, revealed at last, is one of history's best-kept secrets!

WHY HAS the truth about the journeys of the twelve apostles been kept from public knowledge? You read plainly of Paul's travels through Cyprus, Asia Minor, Greece, Italy. But the movements of the original twelve apostles are cloaked in mystery. Why? Now it can be told!

Did it ever seem strange to you that most of the New Testament, following the Book of Acts, was written by Paul, and not by Peter? Did you ever wonder why, after Peter initiated the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles at the house of Cornelius (Acts 10 and 11), he and others of the twelve apostles suddenly vanish from view? And why only Peter and John reappear, for a fleeting moment, in Jerusalem at the inspired conference recorded in Acts 15? You read, after Acts 15, only of Paul's ministry to the GENTILES. Why? What happened to the twelve apostles? Let's understand!

There is a reason why the journeys of the twelve apostles have been cloaked in mystery until now! You probably have been told that Jesus chose the twelve disciples, ordained them apostles, sent them, first, to preach to the Jews. When the Jews, as a nation, rejected that message, you probably have supposed that they turned to the Gentiles. Nothing could be further from the truth. It was the apostle Paul, called years later as a special apostle, who was commissioned to bear the gospel to the Gentiles. To Ananias, who was sent to baptize Paul, Christ gave this assurance:

"Go thy way: for he" - Saul, later named Paul - "he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel" - (Acts 9:15).

It was Paul, not any of the twelve, who said:

"From henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles" - (Acts 18:6).

Jesus would not have called Paul as a special apostle to carry the gospel to the Gentiles, if the original twelve had been commissioned to preach to the Gentiles. Then to WHOM - and where - were the twelve apostles sent?

Jesus' Commission Tells

Notice the surprising answer - in Matthew 10:5-6:

“These twelve Jesus sent forth, and **COMMANDED** them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: but go rather to the LOST sheep of the house of Israel.”

Read it, from your Bible, with your own eyes:

“Go NOT into the way of the Gentiles, but go rather to the lost sheep of the HOUSE OF ISRAEL!”

Jesus meant what He said! He “**COMMANDED** them.” The twelve were forbidden to spread the gospel among the Gentiles. It was Paul who was commissioned to that work. The twelve were to go, instead, to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel” - the Lost Ten Tribes! Granted, Christ did send Peter to the home of Cornelius (Acts 10 and 11) to open the gospel to the Gentiles, but Peter’s life mission was to carry the gospel to “the lost sheep of the House of Israel.” Peter merely opened the door, as the chief apostle, for the Gentiles. It was Paul who went through the door and brought the gospel to the nations. Granted, Peter, in his capacity of chief apostle, made one trip to the gentile Samaritans. But that was not to bring the gospel to them. **PHILIP HAD DONE THAT!** Peter and John merely prayed for the Samaritans that they would receive the Holy Spirit. (See Acts 8, verses 5, and 14 through 17.)

Now we know **TO WHOM** the twelve apostles were sent. They were not sent to the Gentiles, but to “the lost sheep of the House of Israel.” It was Paul who went to the Gentiles. Now to discover **WHERE** Peter and others of the twelve went after they left Palestine. That has been one of the best-kept secrets of history! If the world had known the lands to which the twelve apostles journeyed, the House of Israel would never have been LOST from view! But God intended, for a special purpose, which few understand, that the identity of the lost House of Israel should not be revealed until this pulsating twenty first century!

"House Of Israel" Identified

From the sons of Jacob - surnamed Israel - sprang twelve tribes. Under David they were united as one nation - Israel.

After the death of Solomon, David’s son, the twelve tribes were divided into two nations. The tribe of Judah split off from the nation Israel in order to retain the king, whom Israel had rejected. Benjamin went with Judah. The new nation thus formed, with its capital at Jerusalem, was known as the “House of Judah.” Its people were called Jews. The northern ten tribes, who rejected Solomon’s son, became known as the “House of Israel.” Its capital, later, was Samaria.

Whole books of the Old Testament are devoted to the power struggles between the “House of Israel” and Judah. The first time the word “Jews” appears in the Bible you will discover the king of Israel, allied with Syria, driving the Jews from the Red Sea port of Elath (II Kings 16:6-7). The northern ten tribes, the House of Israel, were overthrown by the mighty Assyrian Empire. Its people were led into captivity beyond the Tigris River and planted in Assyria and the cities of the Medes around lake Urmia, southwest of the Caspian Sea. In the now-desolate cities of the land of Samaria the Assyrians brought in Gentiles from Babylonia. These Gentiles (II Kings 17) had become known as Samaritans by the time of Christ. The House of Israel never returned to Palestine. The nation became known in history as the “Lost Ten Tribes.” To them Jesus sent the twelve apostles!

The House of Judah - the Jews - remained in Palestine until the Babylonian invasion, which commenced in 604 B.C. Judah was deported to Mesopotamia. Seventy years later they returned to Palestine. In history they now become commonly known as "Israel" because they were the only descendants of Jacob - or Israel - now living in Palestine. The ten tribes - the House of Israel - became lost in the land of their exile. Jesus "came to his own" - the House of Judah, the Jews - "and his own received him not" - (John 1:11). Jesus was of the lineage of David, of the House of Judah. When His own people - the Jews - rejected Him, He did not turn to the Gentiles. It was Paul who did. Instead, Jesus said to the Gentile woman:

"I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the House of Israel" - (Matthew 15:24).

To fulfill, later, that divine mission - for Jesus was soon slain on Golgotha to pay for the sins of the world - He commissioned His twelve disciples. THEY were commanded:

"Go to the lost sheep of the House of Israel."

They did go, but history has lost sight of where they went! Their journeys have been shrouded in mystery -until now!

What The New Testament Reveals

The history of the early New Testament church is preserved in the book of Acts. But have you ever noticed that Acts ends in the middle of the story? Luke doesn't even finish the life of Paul after his two-years' imprisonment ended!

Why? You will find the answer in Christ's commission to Paul. Even before Paul was baptized, Christ had planned the future work he was to accomplish. First, Paul was to teach the Gentiles - which he did in Cyprus, Asia Minor and Greece. Second, he was to appear before kings - an event brought about by a two-year imprisonment at Rome. At the end of that two-year period, during which no accusers had appeared, Paul would automatically have been released according to Roman law. It is at this point that Luke strangely breaks off the story of Paul's life. See Acts 28:31. But Paul's third mission was not yet accomplished! Christ had chosen Paul for a threefold purpose - "to bear His name before the Gentiles, and kings, AND THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL" - (Acts 9:15). There is the answer. He, too, was to end his work among the Lost Ten Tribes!

Luke was not permitted by Christ to include in Acts the final journeys of Paul's life. It would have revealed the whereabouts of the children of Israel! It was not then God's time to make that known. But the moment has now come, in this climactic "time of the end," to pull back the shroud of history and reveal where the twelve apostles went.

Three Missing Words

Now turn to the book of James. To whom is it addressed? Read it:

"James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, TO THE TWELVE TRIBES WHICH ARE SCATTERED ABROAD, greeting" (first verse).

You probably never noticed that before. This book is not addressed to the Gentiles. It is not addressed exclusively to Judah - the Jews. It is addressed to ALL TWELVE TRIBES. To the House of Judah and to the House of Israel - the Lost Ten Tribes. Have

you ever noticed that the letter of James, like the book of Acts, ends abruptly, without the normal salutations? Read it - James 5:20.

Compare it with Paul's epistles. In the original inspired Greek New Testament every one of Paul's letters ends with an "Amen." Every one of the four gospels ends with an "Amen." The book of Revelation ends with an "Amen." This little word "Amen." of Hebrew derivation, signifies completion.

In the Authorized Version (most modern versions are incorrect, and in several instances carelessly leave off the proper ending found in the Greek) every one of the New Testament books ends with an "Amen" except THREE - Acts, James and III John.

In these three, and these three only, the word "Amen" is not in the inspired original Greek. It is purposely missing. Why? Each missing "Amen" is a special sign. It indicates God wants us to understand that certain knowledge was not to be made known to the world - until now, when the gospel is being sent around the world as a final witness before the end of this age.

God purposely excluded from the book of Acts the final chapters in the history of the early true Church. If they had been included, the identity and whereabouts of Israel and of the true Church would have been revealed! It is part of God's plan that the House of Israel should lose its identity and think itself Gentile.

If the book of James had ended with the ordinary salutation, the nations of Israel would have been disclosed. Paul often ends his letters with names of places and people. See the last verses of Romans, Colossians, Hebrews, for example. This is the very part missing, purposely, from James!

And why was the short letter of III John missing an "Amen"? Let John himself tell us, "I had many things to write: but I will not with ink and pen write unto thee" (verse 13). John reveals, in the letter, a pagan conspiracy. It was a diabolical attempt by Simon Magus and his false apostles to seize the name of Christ, gain control of the true Church, and masquerade as "Christianity." God did not permit John to make known, in plain language, the names of the leaders of that conspiracy, and the city of their operation. That is why John cut his letter short. The missing "Amen" is to tell us to look elsewhere in the Bible for the answer. It is described, if you have eyes to see, in Revelation 17, Acts 8 and many other chapters of the Bible. The time to unmask that conspiracy is now (II Thessalonians 2), just before the return of Christ. But to return, for a moment, to the letter of James.

Wars Reveal Where

From James 4:1 we learn that WARS were being waged among the lost tribes of Israel.

"From whence come WARS and fightings among you?" asks James. What wars were these? No wars existed among the Jews until the outbreak, several years later, of the revolt against the Romans. These wars absolutely identify the lost House of Israel - the lands to which the twelve apostles journeyed. James wrote his book about A.D. 60 (he was martyred about two years later according to Josephus). The world was temporarily at peace - cowed by the fear of Roman military might.

Just prior to A.D. 60 ONLY TWO AREAS of the world were torn by wars and civil fightings. When you discover which areas these were, you will have located where the Lost Ten Tribes, addressed by James, were then living! All one need do is search

the records of military history for the period immediately before and up to the year A.D. 60! The results will shock you! Those two lands were the BRITISH ISLES AND THE PARTHIAN EMPIRE! But these were not the only lands to which the exiled House of Israel journeyed. Turn, in your Bible, to I Peter.

To Whom Did Peter Write?

To whom did Peter address his letters? Here it is:

“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the STRANGERS scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” - (I Peter 1:1).

These were not Gentiles. Peter was not the apostle to the Gentiles (Galatians 2:8). Paul was. Peter was chief apostle to the lost sheep of the House of Israel. Notice the word “strangers.” It does not mean Gentiles. The original Greek is “parepidemos”. It means “a resident foreigner,” literally, “an alien alongside.” It refers not to Gentiles, but to non-Gentiles who dwelt among Gentiles, as foreigners and aliens. Abraham, for example, was a stranger, an alien, when he lived among the Canaanite Gentiles in Palestine.

Peter was addressing part of the lost ten tribes who dwelt among the Gentiles as aliens or strangers. He was not writing primarily to Jews. He would not have addressed them as “strangers,” for he was himself a Jew. Now notice the regions to which Peter addressed his letter. You may have to look at a Bible map to locate them. They are all located in the NORTHERN HALF of Asia Minor, modern Turkey. These lands lay immediately west of the Parthian Empire!

Paul did not preach in these districts. Paul spent his years in Asia Minor in the SOUTHERN, or Greek half.

“Yea, so have I strived,” said Paul, “to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man’s foundation” - (Romans 15:20).

Paul did not preach in the areas where Peter and others of the twelve apostles had carried the gospel. Nowhere in your New Testament can you find Paul preaching in Pontus, or Cappadocia, or Bithynia. These regions were under the jurisdiction of Peter and certain of the twelve. Paul did spread the gospel in the province of Asia - but only in the southern half, in the districts around Ephesus. Paul was expressly forbidden to preach in Mysia, the northern district of the Roman province of Asia.

“After they” - Paul and his companions - “were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered [permitted] them not. And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas” - (Acts 16:7,8).

Those were the regions in which the lost sheep of the House of Israel dwelt as strangers among the Gentiles! Paul did preach, on his first journey, in SOUTHERN Galatia, in the cities of Iconium, Lystra, Derbe (Acts 14). But nowhere in the New Testament do you find Paul journeying into northern Galatia - the area to which Peter addresses his letter to the tribes of Israel!

Remnant Of Ten Tribes On Shores Of Black Sea

Notice the historic proof - confirming Peter’s letters - that a remnant of the House of Israel was settled on the shores of the Black Sea in northern Asia Minor in early New Testament times. Greek writers, in the time of Christ, recognized that the regions of

northern Asia Minor were non-Greek (except for a few Greek trading colonies in the port cities). New peoples, the Greeks tell us were living in northern Asia Minor in New Testament times. Here is the surprising account of Diodorus of Sicily:

“... many conquered peoples were removed to other homes and two of these became very great colonies: the one was composed of Assyrians and was removed to the land between Paphlagonia and Pontus, and the other was drawn from Media and planted along the Tanais (the River Don in ancient Scythia - the modern Ukraine, north of the Black Sea, in southern Russia).” - See book II, § 43.

Notice the areas from which these colonies came - Assyria and Media. The very areas to which the House of Israel was taken captive!

“So was Israel carried away out of their own land TO ASSYRIA unto this day” - (II Kings 17:23).

“The king of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away INTO ASSYRIA and placed them in Halah and in Habor by the River of Gozan, and in the CITIES OF THE MEDES” - (verse 6).

The House of Israel dwelt in captivity as aliens or strangers among the Assyrians. When the Assyrians were later removed from their homeland to northern Asia Minor, part of the House of Israel migrated with them! Here's the proof from Strabo, the geographer. Strabo named the colonists in northern Asia Minor “White Syrians” (12, 3, 9), instead of Assyrians. There were therefore, TWO peoples - Assyrians and White Syrians. Who were these so-called “White Syrians”? None other than the House of Israel which had been carried into Assyrian captivity. “Syria” was the Greek name for the whole eastern Mediterranean coastal strip north of Judea. Because the House of Israel lived in Palestine - southern Syria in Greek terminology - the Greeks called them “White Syrians.”

By contrast, the dark-complexioned Arameans remained in Syria and dwell there to this day. When the Assyrians were compelled to migrate to Northern Asia Minor, their former slaves - the “White Syrians” or ten-tribed House of Israel - migrated with them! We find them still there in New Testament times. To these people - the lost sheep of the House of Israel - the strangers among the Assyrians (I Peter 1:1) - the apostle Peter addresses his first letter! Could anything be plainer?

The chief apostle to the House of Israel writing to a part of the ten lost tribes dwelling among the Assyrians who originally carried them captive! We shall see later WHEN and WHERE these “lost sheep” migrated from Asia Minor to Northwest Europe. Now to draw back the curtain of history. See where each of the twelve apostles preached. You'll be amazed at the revelation.

What Greek Historians Report

Why is it that almost no one has thought of it before? If multitudes of Greeks in Southern Asia Minor were being converted to Christ by the ministry of Paul, and at the same time multitudes among the lost ten tribes of the House of Israel were being converted in northern Asia Minor, should not those Greeks have left the record of which of the twelve apostles carried the gospel there? Consider this also.

The Greeks have not lost the Greek New Testament. They have handed it down from generation to generation. Is it not just as likely that Greek scholars should have preserved the account of the ministry of the twelve apostles? They have done just that! Yet almost no one has believed them! What the Greeks report is not what most

people expect to find! Some, who do not understand the difference between the House of Israel and the Jews imagine the apostles went exclusively to Jews. Even some of those who know where the House of Israel is today often cannot believe that several of the tribes of Israel were not, in the apostles' day, where they are today.

Scholars have long puzzled over the remarkable information which the Greeks have handed down. These historical reports of the apostles are altogether different from the spurious apocryphal literature of the early Roman Catholic Church. Greek historians, in the early Middle Ages, have left us information from original documents that apparently are no longer extant. They had firsthand sources of information not now available to the scholarly world.

What do those Greek historians report? One valuable source of information is the Greek and Latin "*Ecclesiasticae Historiae*" of Nicephorus Callistus. Another, in English, is "*Antiquitates Apostolicae*" by William Cave. Universal Greek tradition declares that the apostles did not leave the Syro-Palestinian region until the end of twelve years' ministry. The number 12 symbolizes a new organized beginning. Before those twelve years were up one of the apostles was already dead - James, the brother of John. He had been beheaded by Herod (Acts 12). But where did the remaining apostles go?

Simon Peter In Britain!

Begin with Simon Peter. Peter was made by Christ the chief among the twelve apostles to co-ordinate their work. Of necessity Peter would be found traveling to many more regions than he would personally be ministering to. The question is where did he spend most of his time? We know Peter was for a limited time at Babylon in Mesopotamia, from which he wrote the letters to the churches in Asia Minor (I Peter 5:13). Babylon at the time was under the rule of the PARTHIAN EMPIRE!

Babylon was the major city from which the apostles in the east worked. Similarly Paul and the evangelists under him used Antioch in Syria as their chief city (Acts 14:26). The order in which Peter, in verse one of his first epistle, named the provinces of Asia Minor - from east to west and back - clearly proves that the letter was sent from Babylon in the east, not Rome in the west. Rome did not become designated as "Modern Babylon" until Christ revealed it, much later, after Peter's death, in the book of Revelation, chapter 17.

Where did Peter spend most of his time after those first twelve years in Palestine? Metapirastes, the Greek historian, reports "that Peter was not only in these WESTERN parts" - the Western Mediterranean - "but particularly that he was a long time" - here we have Peter's main life work to the Lost Ten Tribes - "... a long time in BRITAIN, where he converted many nations to the faith." (See marginal note, p. 45, in Cave's "*Antiquitates Apostolicae*".)

Peter preached the gospel in Great Britain, not in Rome, the capital of the Gentile world. Paul, not Peter, preached in Rome. The true gospel had not been PUBLICLY preached in Rome before Paul arrived in A.D. 59. Paul never once mentions Peter in his epistle to the brethren in Rome, most of whom had been converted on Pentecost in 31 A.D. Not even the Jews at Rome had heard the gospel preached before Paul arrived! Here is Luke's inspired account of Paul's arrival in Rome:

"And it came to pass, that after three days Paul called the chief of the Jews together." Continuing, Acts 28:21. "And they" - the Jews at Rome - "said unto him, We neither

received letters out of Judaea concerning thee, neither any of the brethren that came shewed or spake any harm of thee. But WE DESIRE TO HEAR OF THEE WHAT THOU THINKEST: for as concerning this sect we know that everywhere it is spoken against. And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening" - (verses 21-23).

Here is absolute proof the Jews at Rome had never heard the apostle Peter preach. Oh yes, there had been a "Peter" in Rome ever since the days of Claudius Caesar. That Peter was in a high office. He was chief of the Babylonian Mysteries. His office was that of a "Peter" - meaning an Interpreter or Opener of Secrets. The word "peter", in Babylonian and Hebrew, means "opener" - hence it is used in the original Hebrew of the Old Testament for "firstling" - one that first OPENS the womb.

THAT Peter of Rome was named Simon, too. Simon Magus (Acts 8). He was the leading conspirator in the plot hatched by the priests of the pagan Babylonian-Samaritan mysteries. These plotters sought to seize upon the name of Christ as a cloak for their diabolical religion. These conspirators became the founders of what today masquerades in the world as the "Christian Religion." - (See III John.) But Simon Peter, Christ's apostle, was in Britain, preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God.

The very fact that Peter preached in Britain is proof in itself that part of the Lost House of Israel was already there! Peter was commissioned to go to the lost tribes. And significantly, about A.D. 60 great wars overtook Britain - just as James warned (in the fourth chapter, verse 1) the twelve tribes of Israel! Could history be any clearer?

Where Are Peter And Paul Buried?

For centuries the Christian world has taken for granted that Peter and Paul are buried in Rome. No one, it seems, has thought to question the tradition. Granted, Paul was brought to Rome about A.D. 67. He was beheaded, then buried on the Ostian Way. But are his remains still there? Granted, too, that universal tradition declared the apostle Peter was also brought to Rome in Nero's reign and martyred about the same time. Many pieces of ancient literature - some spurious, some factual - confirm that both Simon Magus, the false apostle, who masqueraded as Peter, and Simon Peter himself died at Rome. The question is - which Simon is buried today under the Vatican? Is there proof that the bones of the apostles Peter and Paul were moved from Rome, and are not there now? YES!

There is a reason the Vatican has been hesitant to claim the apostle Peter's tomb has been found! They know that it is Simon Magus, the false Peter, who is buried there, not Simon Peter the apostle. Here is what happened.

In the year 656 Pope Vitalian decided the Catholic Church was not interested in the remains of the apostles Peter and Paul. THE POPE THEREFORE ORDERED THEM SENT TO OSWY, KING OF BRITAIN! Here is part of his letter to the British king: "HOWEVER, WE HAVE ORDERED THE BLESSED GIFTS OF THE HOLY MARTYRS, THAT IS, THE RELICS OF THE BLESSED APOSTLES, PETER AND PAUL, AND OF THE HOLY MARTYRS LAURENTIUS, JOHN, AND PAUL, AND GREGORY, AND PANCRA TIUS, TO BE DELIVERED TO THE BEARERS OF THESE OUR LETTERS, TO BE BY THEM DELIVERED TO YOU" - (Bede's "Ecclesiastical History", bk. III, ch. 29).

Could anything be more astounding? The bones of Peter and Paul (termed “relics” in the Pope’s letter) sent by the Pope from Rome to Britain - to the land of Israel! About a century and a half earlier Constantius of Lyons took the relics of all the apostles and martyrs from Gaul and buried them in a special tomb at ST ALBANS IN BRITAIN. (Life of St Germanus.) Is it significant that the work of God and God’s College in Britain are in St Albans? Think that over!

And Andrew His Brother?

Britain, after A.D. 449, was settled by hundreds of thousands of new people not there in Peter’s day. History knows them as Angles and Saxons. They came originally from the shores of the Black Sea - where the House of Israel dwelt! In A.D. 256 they began to migrate from northern Asia Minor along the shores of the Black Sea to the Cymbric Peninsula (Denmark) opposite Britain. These were the people to whose ancestors Peter wrote his epistles. Which one of the twelve apostles preached to their ancestors - the so-called “White Syrians” - while they abode by the Bosphorus and on the Black Sea? Listen to the answer from Greek historians:

“In this division Andrew had SCYTHIA, and the neighboring countries primarily allotted him for his province. First then he travelled through Cappadocia, (Upper) Galatia and Bithynia, and instructed them in the faith of Christ, passing all along the EUXINE Sea” - the old name for the Black Sea! - “... and so into the solitude of SCYTHIA.”

One early Greek author gives these journeys in special detail, just as if Luke had written an account of the other apostles as he did of Paul.

Andrew “went next to Trapezus, a maritime city on the Euxine Sea, whence after many other places he came to Nice, where he stayed two years, preaching and working miracles with great success: thence to Nicomedia, and so to Chalcedon; whence sailing through the Propontis he came by the Euxine Sea to Heraclea, and from thence to Amastris He next came to Sinope, a city situated upon the same sea, ... here he met with his brother Peter, with whom he stayed a considerable time Departing hence, he went again to Amynsus and then ... he proposed to return to Jerusalem” - the headquarters church. “Whence after some time he betook himself ... to the country of Abasgi [a land in the Caucasus] ... Hence he removed into ... Asiatic Scythia or Sarmatia, but finding the inhabitants very barbarous and intractable, he stayed not long among them, only at Cherson, or Chersonesus, a great and populous city within the Bosphorus [this Bosphorus is the modern Crimea], he continued for some time, instructing them and confirming them in the faith. Hence taking ship, he sailed across the sea to Sinope, situated in Paphlagonia ...” (pp. 137-138 of Cave’s “Antiquitates Apostolicae”.)

Here we find Andrew preaching to the very areas in Asia Minor which Paul bypassed. From this region, and from Scythia north of the Black Sea, migrated the ancestors of the Scots and Anglo-Saxons, as we have already seen. They are of the House of Israel - or else Andrew disobeyed his commission! And what of the modern Scottish tradition that Andrew preached to their ancestors? Significant? Indeed!

And The Other Apostles?

And where did Simon the Zealot carry the gospel? Here, from the Greek records, is the route of his journey: Simon “directed his journey toward Egypt, then to Cyrene, and Africa ... and throughout Mauritania and all Libya, preaching the gospel Nor could the coldness of the climate benumb his zeal, or hinder him from whipping

himself and the Christian doctrine over to the WESTERN Islands, yea, even to Britain itself. Here he preached and wrought many miracles“

Nicephorus and Dorotheus both wrote “that he went at last into BRITAIN, and ... was crucified ... and buried there” (p. 203 of Cave’s “Antiq. Apost.”). Think of it. Another of the twelve apostles is found preaching to the Lost Tribes of Israel in Britain and the West. But what is Simon the Zealot doing in North Africa? Were remnants of the House of Israel there, too? Had some fled westward in 721 B.C. at the time of the Assyrian conquest of Palestine? Here is Geoffrey of Monmouth’s answer:

“The Saxons ... went unto Gormund, King of the Africans, IN IRELAND, wherein, adventuring thither with a vast fleet, he had conquered the folk of the country. Thereupon, by the treachery of the Saxons, he sailed across with a hundred and sixty thousand Africans into Britain ... (and) laid waste, as has been said, well-nigh the whole island with his countless thousands of Africans” (bk. xi, sect. 8, 10).

These countless thousands were not Negroes, or Arabs. They were whites - Nordics - who came from North Africa and Mauritania, where Simon preached. These Nordics, declares the “Universal History” (1748-Vol. xviii, p. 194), “gave out that their ancestors were driven out of Asia by a powerful enemy, and pursued into Greece; from whence they made their escape” to North Africa. “But this ... was to be understood only of the WHITE nations inhabiting some parts of western Barbary and Numidia.” What white nation was driven from the western shores of western Asia? The House of Israel! Their powerful enemy? The Assyrians!

For almost three centuries after the time of Simon Zelotes they remained in Mauritania. But they are not in North Africa today. They arrived in Britain shortly after A.D. 449 at the time of the Anglo-Saxon invasion. In A.D. 598, when the bishop of Rome sent Augustine to bring Catholicism to England he found the inhabitants were already professing Christians! Their ancestors had already heard the message from one of the twelve apostles!

And Ireland Too!

Another of the apostles sent to the lost sheep of the House of Israel was James, the son of Alphaeus. Some early writers were confused by the fact that two of the twelve apostles were named James. James, son of Alphaeus, was the one who left Palestine after the first twelve years. The deeds of this apostle are sometimes mistakenly assigned to James, John’s brother. But THAT James was already martyred by Herod (Acts 12:2).

Where Did James, Son Of Alphaeus, Preach?

“The Spanish writers generally contend, after the death of Stephen he came to these WESTERN parts, and particularly into SPAIN (some add BRITAIN and IRELAND) where he planted Christianity” (p. 148 of Cave’s work).

Note it. Yet another apostle sent to the lost sheep of the House of Israel ends in the British Isles - in IRELAND as well as in Britain! Eusebius, in his third book of “Evangelical Demonstrations”, chapter 7, admitted that the apostles “passed over to those which are called the British Isles.” Again he wrote: “Some of the Apostles preached the Gospel in the British Isles.” Could anything be plainer? Even in Spain James spent some time. Why Spain? From ancient times Spain was the high road of migration from the eastern Mediterranean Sea to the British Isles. The ancient royal House of Ireland for a time dwelt in Spain. The prophet Jeremiah passed through

Spain into Ireland with Zedekiah's daughters (Jeremiah 41:10; 43:6). Even today a vital part of the Iberian Peninsula - Gibraltar - belongs to the birthright tribe of Ephraim - the British!

Paul In Britain, Too?

Turn, now, to added proof of the apostles' mission to the lost sheep of the House of Israel in the British Isles. From an old volume, published in 1674, by William Camden, we read:

"The true Christian Religion was planted here most anciently by Joseph of Arimathea, Simon Zelotes, Aristobulus, by St Peter, and St Paul, as may be proved by Dorotheus, Theodoretus and Sophronius." ("Remains of Britain", page 5.)

Did you catch that? Paul is now included! Had Paul planned to go from Italy into Spain and then Britain? Here is his answer:

"... I will come by you into Spain" - (Romans 15:28).

Clement of Rome, in his letter to the Corinthians, confirms Paul's journey to the West. But did that include Britain? Listen to the words of the Greek church historian Theodoret. He reports:

"That St Paul brought salvation TO THE ISLES THAT LIE IN THE OCEAN" (book I, on Psalm 116 p. 870). The British Isles! But was that merely to preach to the Gentiles? Not at all.

Remember that the THIRD AND LAST PART of Paul's commission, after he revealed Christ to the kings and rulers at Rome, was to bear the name of Jesus to the "children of Israel" - (Acts 9:15) - the Lost Ten Tribes. This is not a prophecy concerning Jews, whom Paul had previously reached in the Greek world of the eastern Mediterranean. This is a prophecy of Paul's mission to the British Isles! Could anything be more astounding?

[There's an apocryphal lost chapter of Acts which talks of Paul after his trial in Rome leaving for Spain and then to Britain for he had heard "that certain of the children of Israel, about the time of the Assyrian captivity, had escaped by sea to 'The Isles afar off' called by the Romans Britain" where he spoke at Mount Lud near St Paul's Cathedral in London and converted many people. After passing through France and Belgium it speaks of him going to Mount Pilatus, one of my favourite places I've been to in Switzerland, where he and others see a great sign in Lake Lucerne relating to Pilate and the crucifixion - Editor RW].

On The Shores Of The Caspian Sea

James referred to Israel as SCATTERED ABROAD. We have found them in Northwest Europe. And in North Africa, from whence they migrated into Britain in the fifth century. And in northern Asia Minor, associated with the Assyrians. In 256 they began to migrate from the regions of the Black Sea to Denmark. thence into the British Isles in 449.

But remnants of the Ten Lost Tribes were yet in another vast region beyond the confines of the Roman Empire. That region was known as the Kingdom of Parthia. Who the Parthians were has long remained a mystery. They suddenly appear near the Caspian Sea around 700 B.C. as slaves of the Assyrians. "According to Diodorus,

who probably followed Ctesias, they passed from the dominion of the Assyrians to that of the Medes, and from dependence upon the Medes to a similar position under the Persians." (Rawlinson's "Monarchies", Vol. IV, p. 26, quoted from Diod. Sic., ii 2, § 3; 34, § I and § 6.)

The Parthians rose to power around 250 B.C. in the lands along the southern shores of the Caspian Sea. That was the very land into which Israel was EXILED! What puzzles historians is that the Parthians were neither Persians, nor Medes, nor Assyrians or any other known people. Even their name breathes mystery - until you understand the Bible. The word PARTHIAN MEANS EXILE! (See Rawlinson's "The Sixth Monarchy", page 19.) The only exiles in this land were the ten tribes of Israel!

The Parthians were none other than the exiled Lost Ten Tribes who remained in the land of their captivity until A.D. 226. That's when the Persians drove them into Europe. Now consider this. James addressed his letter to the twelve tribes of Israel scattered abroad. He warns the Israelites against the wars being waged among themselves. When James wrote his letter about A.D. 60 the world was at peace except for two regions - Britain and Parthia! There is no mistaking this. Parthia and Britain were Israelite.

Which of the twelve apostles carried the gospel to the Parthian Israelites? The Greek historians reveal that Thomas brought the gospel to "Parthia, after which Sophornius and others inform us, that he preached the gospel to the Medes, Persians, Carmans, Hyrcani, Bactrians, and the neighbor nations" (Cave's "Antiq. Apost.", p. 189). These strange sounding names are the lands we know today as Iran (or Persia) and Afghanistan.

In apostolic days the whole region was subject to the Parthians. Though many Israelites had left the region already, multitudes remained behind, spread over adjoining territory. They lost their identity and became identified with the names of the districts in which they lived. Josephus, the Jewish historian, was familiar with Parthia as a major dwelling place of the Ten Tribes. He declares:

"But then the entire body of the people of Israel (the Ten Tribes) REMAINED IN THAT COUNTRY (they did not return to Palestine); wherefore there are but two tribes in Asia and Europe subject to the Romans, while the ten tribes are beyond Euphrates till now, and are an immense multitude and not to be estimated by numbers" ("Antiq. of the Jews", bk. xi, ch. v, § 2).

There it is! The very area to which Thomas sojourned was, reports Josephus, filled with uncounted multitudes of the Ten Tribes! Josephus was, apparently, unaware of those who had already migrated westward. But he does make it plain that only the House of Judah ever returned to Palestine. The House of Israel was "beyond Euphrates till now"! Parthia was defeated by Persia in 226 A.D. Expelled from Parthia, the Ten Tribes and the Medes moved north of the Black Sea, into Scythia. (See R. G. Latham's "The Native Races of the Russian Empire", page 216.) From there, around A.D. 256, the Ten Tribes migrated with their brethren from Asia Minor into Northwest Europe. This migration was occasioned by a concerted Roman attack in the east. It backfired on the Romans, for hordes of Israelites and Assyrians suddenly broke through the Roman defences in the West that same year!

Thomas also journeyed into Northwest India, east of Persia, where the "White Indians" dwelt. These "White Indians" - that is, whites living in India - were also known as "Nephthalite Huns", in later Greek records. Any connection with the tribe of Naphthali? They were overthrown in the sixth century and migrated into

Scandinavia. The archaeology of Scandinavia confirms this event. BARTHOLOMEW shared, with Thomas, the same vast plains, according to Nicephorus. Bartholomew also spent part of his time in neighboring Armenia and a portion of Upper Phrygia in Asia Minor. Nicephorus termed the area, in his history the "Western and Northern parts of Asia," by which he meant Upper Asia Minor, modern Turkey today. This was the same district to which Andrew carried the gospel, and to which Peter sent two of his letters.

JUDE, also named Libbaeus Thaddaeus, had part in the ministry in Assyria and Mesopotamia. That is part of Parthia which Josephus designated as still inhabited by the Ten Tribes. The Parthian kingdom, which was composed of the Ten Tribes ruling over Gentiles, possessed Assyria and Mesopotamia during most of the New Testament period. From the famous city Babylon, in Mesopotamia, Peter directed the work of all the apostles in the East. Scythia and Upper Asia (meaning Asia Minor) were the regions assigned to Philip. (See Cave's "Antiq. Apost.," p. 168.)

Scythia was the name of the vast plain north of the Black and the Caspian Seas. To this region a great colony of Israelites migrated after the fall of the Persian Empire in 331. From Scythia migrated the SCOTS. The word Scot is derived from the word Scyth. It means an inhabitant of Scythia. The Scots are part of the House of Israel. Interestingly, the word Scythia, in Celtic, has the same meaning that HEBREW does in the Semitic language - a migrant or wanderer!

Where Did Matthew Go?

Matthew, Metaphrastes tells us, "went first into Parthia, and having successfully planted Christianity in those parts, thence travelled to Aethiopia, that is, the Asiatic Aethiopia, lying near India." For some centuries this region of the Hindu Kush, bordering on Scythia and Parthia, was known as "White India." It lies slightly east of the area where the Assyrians settled the Israelite captives. A natural process of growth led the House of Israel to these sparsely populated regions. From there they migrated to Northwest Europe in the sixth century long after the Apostles' time. Dorotheus declares Matthew was buried at Hierapolis in Parthia. The Parthian kingdom was, in fact, a loose union of those lost tribes of Israel who dwelt in Central Asia during this period. The Persians finally drove them all out. Whenever Parthia prospered, other nations prospered. Whenever the Parthians suffered reverses, other nations suffered. Remember the Scripture: "And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee" - (Genesis 12:3).

Ethiopic and Greek sources designate Dacia (modern Romania) and Macedonia, north of Greece, as part of the ministry of Matthias. Dacia was the extreme western part of Scythia. From Dacia came the Normans who ultimately settled in France and Britain. The French tradition that Mary, the mother of Jesus, journeyed into Gaul (modern France) lends heavy weight to John's having been in Gaul in his earlier years. It was to John that Jesus committed Mary's care. She would be where he was working. Paul knew Gaul to be an area settled by the House of Israel. He bypassed Gaul on his way from Italy to Spain (Romans 15:24, 28). Gaul must have been reached by one of the twelve.

How plain! How can any misunderstand! Here is historic PROOF to confirm, absolutely, the identity and location of "the House of Israel." The identity of Israel, from secular sources, is itself also independent and absolute proof of where the twelve apostles carried out God's work. How marvelous are the mysteries of God when we understand them!

CHAPTER 18

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES (PART 1)

Introduction

The following is taken from the NKJV Personal Study Edition, Nelson Publishers, 1990,1995.

The Epistle of James is known as one of the General Epistles of the New Testament. They are called general because they were written as circular letters to be passed around and read in several churches.

AUTHOR AND DATE

The writer identifies himself only as "James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ" (1:1). The author was probably the same James who led the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15:13). Paul refers to this James as "the Lord's brother," and includes him among the "apostles" (Gal.1:19). He also characterizes him as one of the "pillars" of the church (Gal. 2:9).

This James is mentioned twice in the Gospels (Matt.13:55; Mark 6:3), both times as one of the brothers of Jesus. Although he is not called a follower of the Lord until after the Resurrection, he was probably among those early disciples who obeyed Jesus' command to wait in the Upper Room and who were there filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:14; 2:4).

When Peter left Palestine (Acts 12:17), James seems to have become the leader of the Jerusalem church. There is no word in the letter that tells us when it was written. The important point, however, is not the exact year but the period. James was martyred about A.D.63. Conservative scholars therefore usually hold to a date somewhere between A.D. 45 and 62.

BACKGROUND

As leader of the very first church (the church in Jerusalem), James would feel a responsibility for the spiritual life of Christ's followers wherever they were. Thus he wrote this book from pastoral concern to address needs and problems widespread in the church.

CONTENTS

James is a pastoral letter of practical counsel concerning attitudes and actions affecting the spiritual life of the church. The themes follow closely Jesus' own teachings in the Sermon on the Mount. In the epistle we find discussions of the Christian attitude toward trials and temptations, of the right response to poverty, and of the right use of riches. James writes about discrimination, treating others as we would wish to be treated, Christian use of the tongue, the responsibility of teachers, godly wisdom, God's plan for a holy people, and His judgment on selfish persons. The letter concludes with an appeal to the Christian's hope in the Second Coming of Christ. Meanwhile God's people are to continue in prayer, praise, and faithful Christian living.

James' deep concern for the practical outcome of Christian faith may seem to oppose Paul's emphasis on salvation by faith alone. James' position, however, is not an attack on salvation by faith; it is a protest against hypocrisy. He wants the world to know that faith is a transforming force. Salvation by faith results in holy living. This does not contradict Paul's teaching - it complements it. The two emphases are the two facets of a full-orbed Christian faith-redemption and holy living.

James is sure that serving God makes good sense. If you believe what Scripture teaches and if you live by its guidelines, you will come out better than following any alternative. For this reason the book is often compared with the wisdom literature of Old Testament: Job, Proverbs, some Psalms, and Ecclesiastes.

PURPOSE

The letter was written to encourage Christians who were suffering because of their faith. It was addressed "to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad (1:1).....

These Christians of the first century, whether Jews or Gentiles, were always a small minority. They were, therefore, subject to suspicion and sometimes to persecution James recognizes these hazards, but encourages Christians to remain faithful to Christ even when it is difficult or dangerous. He followed his own counsel by dying as a martyr for the faith around A.D. 63.

OUTLINE OF JAMES

1. Salutation 1:1
2. Steadfast in the faith 1:2-27
 - A. Facing tests 1:2-11
 - B. Overcoming temptation 1:12-18
 - C. Doers of the word 1:19-27
3. Christian standards of value 2:1-13
4. Works follow true faith 2:14-26
5. Christian speech 3:1-12
6. The wisdom of God 3:13-18
7. A call to Christian holiness 4:1-17
 - A. Cleansing, the solution to strife 4:1-10
 - B. Submitting to the law and will of God 4:11-17
8. Judgment on the ungodly rich 5:1-6
9. The Second Coming, a hope for Christians 5:7-12
10. Prayer, faith, and reclamation 5:13-20

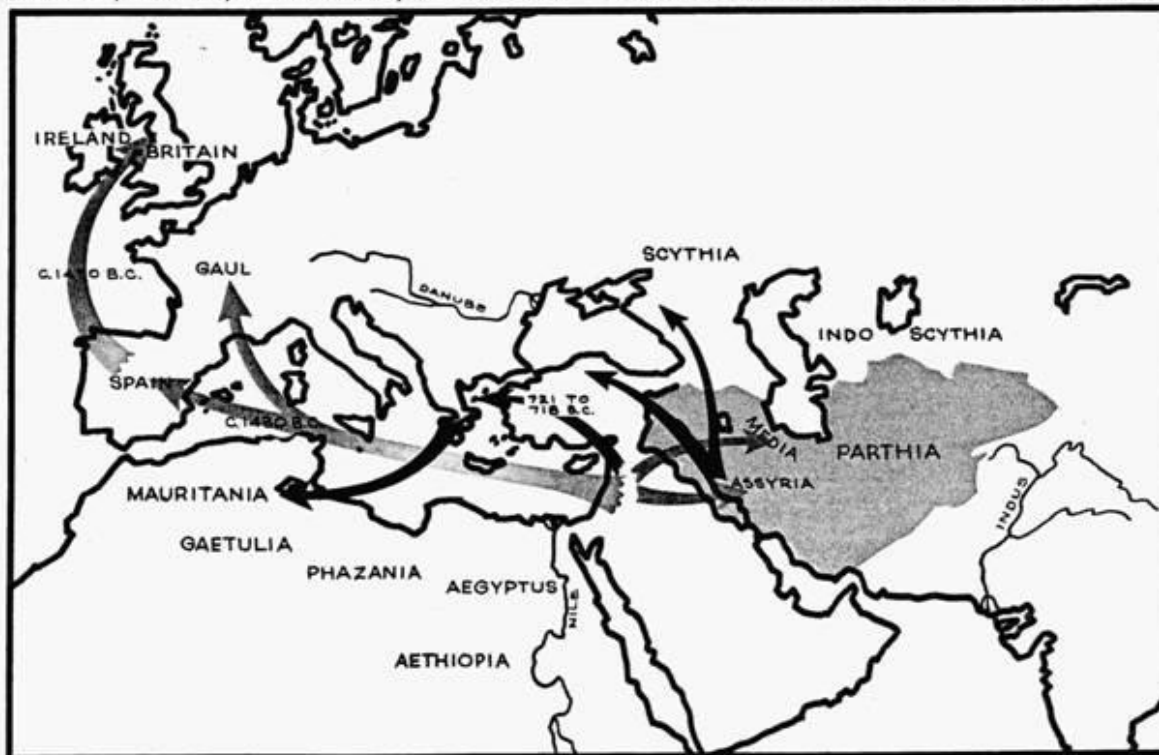
James 1

James says that he was a "bondservant" of the Lord Jesus, not just a servant, but the Greek is "bond" servant, or slave servant, one that is bought for a price. All Christians are bought for a price, the price was the very blood of Jesus Christ.

He addresses his epistle to "the twelve tribes scattered abroad." This is not some fanciful idea (put forth by some modern scholars) of Jewish and maybe Gentile Christians here and there, but it means what he said it to mean the TWELVE TRIBES OF ISRAEL, scattered abroad. And they were indeed. The TEN TRIBES en masse had not returned to Palestine after being deported from Samaria by the Assyrians in 745-709 B.C. Nor had many of the Jews returned to Palestine after the 70 year captivity in Babylon, which started about 604 B.C. Truly the twelve tribes of Israel were scattered abroad in the Roman Empire [and also the Parthian empire – Editor RW].

This map illustrates where Lost Ten Tribes were in apostolic days. From Assyria and Media, the lands of their exile, they spread east into Parthia and northwest around Black Sea. Others, meanwhile, fled from the Assyrians westward to

North Africa. Note the early migration to British Isles under Joshua (1430 B.C.), who is known in Welsh history as "Hesus the Mighty" (compare with Hebrews 4:8). The Hebrew name Joshua is Jesus in Greek. In Welsh it was pronounced Hesus.



A good percentage of the people he was writing to, were very carnal in their nature, they had wars and fightings among themselves (chapter 4). What religion they had was shallow indeed, mixed up in some theological matters, and needed some major overhauling. Some had only a form a godliness, but lacked spiritual depth. All this would hold true that he was writing to a far flung people that had traces of Christianity and God, but needed much help to guide them into true deep roots of what Christianity and being a child of God REALLY meant.

He wanted them to know that having trials and tests, was a good thing, from time to time, for it produced patient endurance, and letting patient endurance produce spiritual muscle, they would become mature and complete, and would lack nothing in fighting the spiritual battle against sin, the world, and the Devil (verses 1-4).

Certainly no one wants trials, and tests, and troubles, to be a daily way of life. Hopefully, for most, that will not be the case. Paul had his times of trials and testing, but as he said, he also had times of fullness and plenty. He just learnt to be content with whichever way it was.

Jesus taught us to pray (in what is known as the Lord's Prayer) that the Father would not "lead us into (temptation) trials" which means, by looking at the whole Bible, that we will be guidable, teachable, correctable people, so God does not have to deal with us in a disciplinarian manner. But sometimes the Lord allows certain trials and tests to come our way. If we endure through them, we will build spiritual muscle and have the mental and emotional tools to endure to the end in our Christian walk.

If we need WISDOM, we are to ask for it, but we are to ask in FAITH, not doubting that we shall have it. A doubting person is like a wave of the sea, just tossed about

by the wind. A doubting or double-minded man is unstable in many of his ways, and such a person should not deceive themselves into thinking God can answer and give them what they desire. A person must have FAITH that God will give them wisdom if they lack it and ask to have it (verses 5-8).

The books of Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes, are looked upon as the WISDOM books. They contain great truths to make one wise, then again all the Bible gives us great wisdom as to how to live pleasing to God. Many examples of wisdom and the lack of wisdom are presented to us throughout the Bible. We need to read and meditate on all of it.

The Bible is not the sum total of all that can be thought of as "wisdom." Our lives may cover many aspects of where wisdom is needed to be used. There are people who specialize in various skills of knowledge and wisdom. Going to the right school, taking the right courses for your abilities and aptitudes, marrying the right mate, buying a home, correctly managing your finances, correctly rearing your children, getting correct advice on plumbing, electrical, car repairs, dog training (if you decide to have one) etc. etc.

It is a wise move to seek out wise and knowledgeable people on things that you may have little knowledge about. That is an all important point in being wise, to acknowledge you are not the sum total of wisdom, and that others have wisdom in different areas of life that you need to gather from them.

Wisdom is a somewhat LARGE topic and certainly a large part of what you will need in life as you live as a Christian and walk through the day to day world. But the basic points above are your overall outline of being a person of wisdom.

The lowly person in material wealth is to rejoice that God has called them, that they are loved and precious in the sight of the Lord. They have a calling that is FAR greater than what any physical material wealth in this life can offer them. It is a calling that truly blows your mind, when you know the truth about the end result of that calling. The Christian's destiny is beyond what the human mind can really comprehend. I have written about it on my website in a study called "A Christian's Destiny." It will give you the technical truth of the matter, but to fully understand what this means we shall have to wait till our resurrection. Yet the technical truth God does want us to understand and to know.

The physical rich person in this life, needs to know that physical riches are not the important thing, they will fade away, will go someday. That day may not be until your death, but as they say, "You can't take it with you" - your physical riches that is. This human life is relatively short, in terms of eternity, somewhat like a blade of grass, it rises, the sun beams down, and it is burnt up, gone. If your physical riches are your whole life and mind, then your life will soon be over and you will fade away.

The point is: if you are physically rich, use it to the glory of God, serve others with it, and do not let those riches dominate your life, remember that serving God IS the most important of all. Some of God's children have been physically wealthy in the past ages, but they first had their mind on God and His way of life, and then they used their riches to help and serve others (verses 9-11).

James says it is a blessing for a person to endure temptation and trials. When he so endures a crown of life will be given. Jesus said in the Gospels, "He that shall endure

to the end shall be saved." There is no such teaching in the Bible as "once saved always saved." The Bible and certainly the New Testament, teaches over and over again, that you must remain faithful in your Christian walk right to the end of your life. We have covered this basic and foundational truth many times in this New Testament story, and in a number of in-depth articles I have written on that subject. God has promised a crown of life to those who love Him. What loving God means is certainly covered in a clear and plain manner by the apostle John in all the books that bear his name.

When trials and tests come, we must not think that God is tempting us to do evil or sin. Now, sure, it is possible to sin when such trials and tests come our way. But those trials and tests are not sent or allowed by God to come upon us in order for us to be tempted to sin.

God is not sitting down in heaven, scratching His head, meditating in deep thought, as to how to tempt us to sin and do evil. God is not calling Jesus in, and all the 24 elders around the His throne, and maybe some of the archangels, to figure out ways to get us to do evil or sin.

In sending or allowing trials and tests to come our way, God is not wanting us to sin, He desires us not to sin. He allows those trials and tests for another purpose altogether, and certainly does not have in mind that we sin as we go through and face those trials and tests.

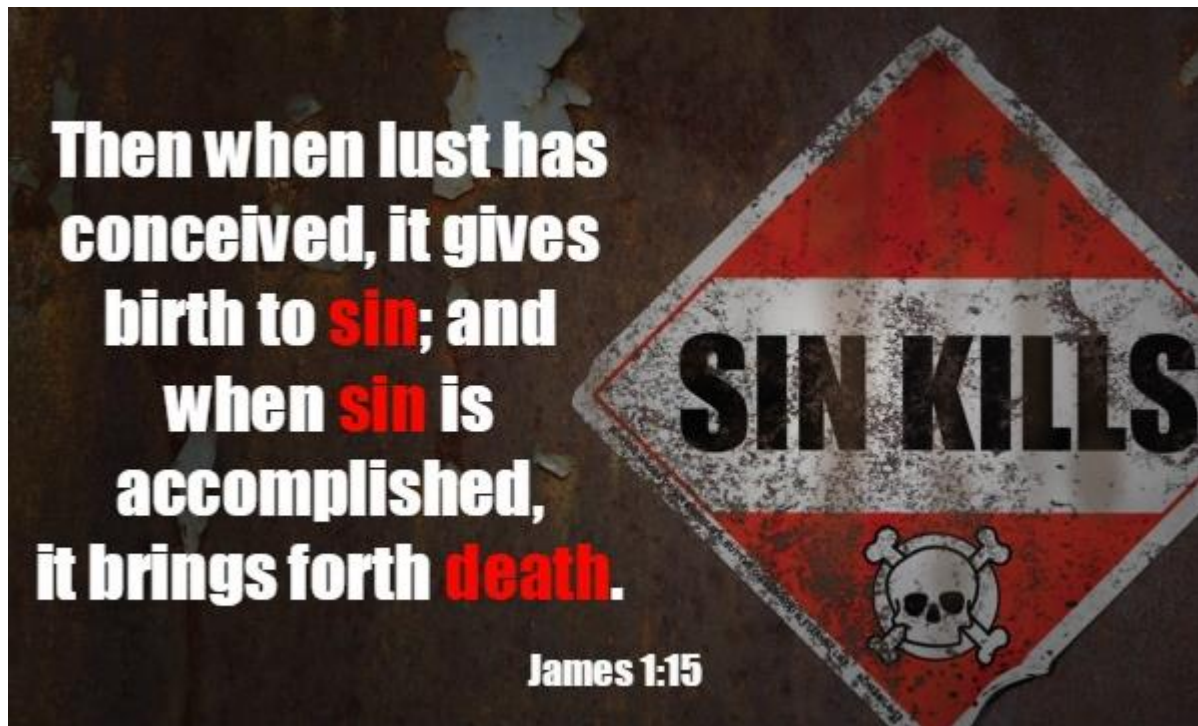
Trials and tests are to help us develop stronger spiritual muscles, so we can have good strong godly strength to endure to the end, no matter what life may throw at us. As some have said, "Bad things can and do happen to good people." As is written in the wisdom of Solomon in Ecclesiastes, "Time and chance happen to all." God NEVER wants or intends us to do evil or sin, when trials and tests come our way.

If during those times of trials and testing we do sin, it is not anything that God can be blamed for. God is there to give us the power, the strength, through His Holy Spirit to overcome sin and evil, just as Jesus did when tempted by the Devil after fasting for 40 days, and at other times tempted as we are, as Paul wrote to the Hebrews, yet did not sin.

We are led into sin, when we meditate on sin, when we dwell on it, when we allow it to stick around in our minds, when we allow our own desires and lusts of carnal nature to entice us to keep meditating on evil and sin. Then when desire has festered in our minds, it finally gives birth to sin, and when sin has developed itself, made growth, then spiritual death comes forth - we have then sinned.

An example is always the best to illustrate this truth. God made the physical body of a grown woman a thing of beauty to the male mind.

There is nothing sinful about the lovely body of a lovely lady. You are perhaps on the beach, on a hot sunny day, and there are many lovely bodied ladies on that beach also. True enough some should not be wearing what they are wearing, the least amount of swim wear they can without having the police take them off the beach.



You as a male, can see what is certainly a lovely well-formed figure of a lady. You can admit she is lovely in form all over, a contender for the Miss Universe contest, for sure. There is nothing so far wrong with this. But if you allow your eyes and mind to dwell on her body, allow your mind to wander into sexual lust, allow sexual fantasy to stick around and grow, then sin has given birth and you have been drawn away by your own desires and lusts and enticed to sin.

Now, I do not want to just pick on the male, I understand from what females have told me, that the above example can work just as well for the female if she sees on the beach some great physical muscular hulk of a man. Sin knows no discrimination.

So it goes, there are all kinds of examples one could think about, where it is not sin initially, but if the mind is allowed to be enticed into wrong thoughts and then maybe wrong actions, sin has been born and spiritual death has given birth (verses 12-15).

No evil comes from God. He is not up there thinking about ways to bring evil and sin to you or the world. Trials and tests He may send or allow to come, but evil and sin, does not come from Him. Only good is from God. He wants to give good and perfect gifts to you and the world. He is the Father of LIGHT, not darkness.

He has no turning or clouding over of His light. His light is always light, pure holy righteous truth and light. It was His will to bring forth children to Himself, by and through the WORD of TRUTH! We, His children, are FIRSTFRUITS to His plan of salvation for all mankind. We, today, called to be His children, are the FIRST of all those born in the past, present, and future ages of mankind.

I have covered this wonderful truth in past chapters of this New Testament Bible Story and in articles of study I have written on the subjects of being called and chosen and having salvation, as well as the studies on the overall PLAN of salvation for mankind.

God has a FIRST-fruits to salvation, and He has a SECOND-fruits to His salvation. The firstfruits will be in the FIRST resurrection at the coming of Christ in glory to establish the Kingdom of God on earth. The others, the second-fruits to salvation will be AFTER that first resurrection of the first-fruits (verses 16-18).

PENTECOST:

Spiritual level of meaning:

Celebrates first smaller harvest

The Church = Firstfruits of God



With all this in mind, James tells us to be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger, for the anger of man does not work the righteousness of God (verse 19). Oh, indeed, what the anger of man has done to bring evil and sin upon himself and others. Think of the anger that led to September 11th 2001 and the World Trade Centre. Think of the anger that led to the school and University killings of the past (remember Virginia Tech. - April 2007).

Paul was inspired to say, "Be angry and SIN NOT." There is a time for righteous anger (Jesus was angry at times), but NEVER for SIN in that anger. The un-righteous anger of man does NOT produce the righteousness of God (verse 20).

We are to lay aside all filthiness and wickedness, and with meekness receive the implanted word of God, live by every word of God, which will then save our lives (verse 21).

We are to not ONLY be HEARERS of the word, but DOERS of the word. If we only hear but do not obey the word, it is like a man looking at himself in the mirror, saying to himself, "Why, what a dirty unshaved, grimy looking face I have," but goes away forgetting what he's looking like.

But he who looks into the LAW OF LIBERTY and CONTINUES therein, and is not a forgetful hearer, but a DOER of the word, he will be blessed in his doing (verses 22-25).

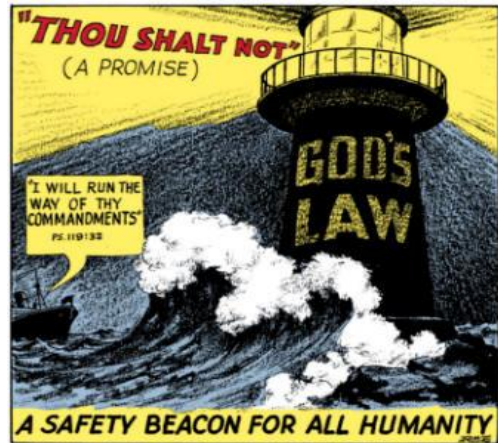
Ah, God's law is not evil, hard, something to hate, something to avoid like the plague! It is a law of LIBERTY. Mark that in your Bible! Color it yellow! God's law is LIBERTY, it brings wonderful blessings to those who obey it. LOOK AT IT, read Exodus 20 or Deuteronomy 5.

If the whole world was obeying those Ten Commandments, what a great place it would be. It would be a place unrecognizable. Let your mind wander on how this world would be if all nations and all people were obeying the Ten Commandments. Frankly, the negative things you've heard from some parts of the Christian religious world concerning the Ten Commandments, is ONLY because of the FOURTH commandment! Those people just do not want to observe the weekly Sabbath day!

They have no problem with the other nine, but they will not give up wanting to do their own thing on the weekly 7th day Sabbath.

But even the Sabbath day command is a law of LIBERTY, and to those who observe it, indeed what liberty it brings. There is great liberty in putting the world, and our work and business to one side for a whole day, and saturate ourselves in the word and fellowship of the Lord. Without that command, many of us would work 7 days a week, week after week, and month after month.

God's LAW is a law of LIBERTY!



Our tongue, what comes out of our mouth in words is more important than many Christians think. James tells us that if we do not bridle our words, our tongue, watch what we say in our conversation with others, we deceive our own hearts and mind, our religion is then useless and vain.

As I got older in the church I grew up in, and entered more and more the adult world of those adults in my church, I was shocked to find how their language was way different (in a bad way) outside of the two hour church service. Our language and the tone of our voice belays the depth of our Christianity. If we do not control our tongue our religion is vain and useless (verse 26).

There are many things in the Bible that define for us what true Christ-likeness and following God is all about. Here in verse 27, James gives us two things that govern our spiritual thermometer. I suspect these two criterion would not be the first to come to a Christian's mind if asked what makes a true Christian. James says to visit the orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world, is pure and undefiled religion before God the Father.

The Lord gave many laws to Israel under the Old Covenant that regulated how orphans and widows were to be helped and served. There are many prophetic warnings to Israel in the books of the prophets, that condemn Israel for NOT looking after the orphans and widows as they should have.

It is no light thing to God to forsake caring for the orphans and widows. You should meditate on how you can serve the orphans and widows in your community or inner circle of life.

To keep oneself unspotted from the world - well maybe that would come to a Christian's mind when thinking about what is a true Christian. But let me tell you it is way more than what some religions say it is. It is way more than not playing cards, entering a movie theatre, not dancing, not wearing make-up. Sure, all of the aforementioned could entail sin in them, if used wrongly. But being unspotted from the world is far more than JUST some physical things, that some religions think is worldliness.

If you are following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, reading all the Bible, meditating on all the lives of all those in the Bible who were godly, yes, seeing their mistakes

and sins, but also seeing their righteousness before God. If you are studying to see WHAT and HOW our heavenly Father wants you to live, if you are allowing the mind of Christ to be in your mind, you will come to know what being unspotted from the world is all about.

CHAPTER 19

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES (PART 2)

James 2

Verses 1-9, show that James was writing to a general population, as we have seen, in the first verse of chapter one, to the twelve tribes of Israel scattered abroad. A general population where synagogues would have been full of people from the rich to the very poor, where many would not have a deep profound relationship with God, and many even less with the Lord Jesus Christ. It would vary from assembly to assembly of course. But it would be to some extent as Paul was to write about the "last days" - having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof." For many in the scattered synagogues of scattered Israel, their religion would be a "form" only - a few hours a week only religion, after those few hours they would pretty well do as they pleased. Which would, for the physically rich, mean they would drag poor people before the judgment seats of the land, if it was to their advantage.

It is a fact of recorded Jewish history that Christians did worship in the synagogues for a number of decades after the Christian faith was fully started in 30 A.D. And sure enough within many of those scattered Jewish synagogues, were a large mixture of people from the very poor to the very wealthy. In the main the majority of Christians in those assemblies were of the former class - relatively in the poor strata of society, as James mentions in verse 5, and Paul also affirmed in 1 Corinthians 1:26,27.

There would be in those assemblies, some class distinction and class prejudice. Not all would be of the Christian faith, and not all would be very godly in their basic way of living. The rich would certainly have the power to bring people before the courts and judgment seats of the world.

For those assemblies that were more "Christian" than Jewish, or shall we say assemblies run by the Christians, rather than run by the Jews (and Christians assemblies would have been "open" to anyone wanting to worship with them on the Sabbath and Festivals, where it was safe to be open, and many parts of the Roman Empire were safe places for open worship, the Romans allowed the Jews freedom of worship, as long as they were "good" citizens of Rome), James was addressing the human problem of "respect of persons" or partiality

There should be no respect of persons in the manner and way you treat either the wealthy or the poor in your assembly. Rich expensive clothes and costly jewelry or the lack of, does not make the person. Outward dress is not a part of the real spiritual character of a person. If we bend over backwards to be nice to the wealthy and give them the best seats in the assembly, and talk and act the exact opposite with the poor, then James says we have become partial in ourselves and have also become judges with evil thoughts (verse 4).

He goes on to say that by and large, God has called and chosen today the poor of this world, ones rich in faith, though relatively poor in physical wealth. Paul was inspired to say the same thing, that not many physical wealthy people are called to the Kingdom of God in this age. How many millionaires do you know in your

assembly, oh, there may be some, but for the most part, most assemblies are made up of the average to lower income bracket of the working world.

In James time, I guess from what he said in verse 6, it was common practice for the rich to drag the poor before the judgments seats of the land. James wanted Christians to live and act with no respect of persons in their attitude of mind. They were to fulfill the ROYAL LAW of God that could be often summed up as "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." And we know from the words of Jesus that our neighbor is ANY other fellow human being. Jesus clearly taught that in His ministry as we have previously seen in the four Gospels.

It is a very important point and subject is the one regarding "respect of persons" - so much so that James said in verse 9, "But if you have respect of persons, you commit SIN, and are convinced of the LAW as TRANSGRESSORS!"

We as Christians are to have the attitude of mind towards any other that we wish they would have towards us, it is indeed, "Do unto others as you would want them to do unto you."

All of what James is expressing is found in the LAW of God. The law of God is not just a narrow 10 points, as people know as the famous TEN COMMANDMENTS, found in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. The law of God is much broader than that. The Ten Commandments are just the high-light of all that is holy and righteous - that makes up the whole character of God, and the way of life that He would want His children to live in this physical life on this physical earth.

There is no specific point in the Ten Commandments that says, "You shall not have respect of persons with each other." But James has already said that living a life with respect of persons is SIN, and you are convicted by the law as a transgressor of that holy law of God.

This section of New Testament Scripture is one proof that the Ten Commandments are MUCH BROADER in intent and application than just the literal words they contain. We saw in the famous so-called "Sermon on the Mount" of Matthew 5,6,7, that Jesus came to MAGNIFY the law of God. He did not come to make it smaller, or do away with one or more of the Ten Commandments. He came as Isaiah the prophet wrote, to MAGNIFY THE LAW (see Isaiah 42: 21).

This section of James chapter 2, does just that also, it MAGNIFIES the ROYAL law (verse 8) - the law of LIBERTY! (verse 12).

Sin is sin, and sin is defined by the Word of the Lord. You may not sin in a number of ways, but sin only in one way and you have still sinned. Or to put it the way James did, you can keep correctly all the laws of God, but offend, or sin in just one of those laws and you have still sinned, or in the long and short of it all, you have offended in all. It only takes ONE sin or offence in ONE point of God's law, that is not repented of, where you will just not REPENT of breaking that point of His royal law, and you are standing on the ground of the unpardonable sin. Remain UN-repentant towards that law of God and you will be condemned to eternal death.

What James quotes in verse 11 is obviously from the Ten Commandments - adultery - murder. It does not matter which you sin in, he just named "respect of persons" as

sin - if you are unrepentant of any sin, you are a transgressor of the royal law, the law of liberty.

The LAWS of God are classified as LIBERTY, not bondage! And it is that law of liberty (just think what liberty from evil it would bring this world if all nations and people lived by the Ten Commandments, and the magnifying of them through the teachings of the whole Bible) that we shall be judged by.

If we are a person filled with MERCY - compassion - forgiveness towards others, when others fail to live up to the perfection of God, as they interact with us. Then God can have mercy upon us when we fail to live up to His perfection towards Him and towards others. It is as Jesus said, "If you have mercy upon others, God will have mercy upon you." It is indeed, "Forgive us our sins Father, as we forgive those who sin against us."

We need to be of a tender merciful attitude. All sins can be forgiven by the Father, if we have an attitude of repentance, if we accept the work of Jesus today as our High Priest, interceding for us. If we are showing mercy towards others, when we have the opportunity to be merciful, if we are humble, lowly in attitude of mind, if we admit we do sin, that we are still sinners (see 1 John 1) then MERCY from God rejoices against justice. We may deserve death, but MERCY will be shown. Justice will not play itself out in our life, mercy will triumph and rejoice over justice. By GRACE (mercy) through FAITH we shall be saved (Ephesians 2:8) to eternal life in the very family of God.

You need to read carefully the study on my website called "Saved by Grace." It will show you the true and only way to salvation.

We now come to the verses (14-26) that many think are a complete contradiction to the argument of Paul. Many think that James and Paul are NOT agreeing. The famous Martin Luther of the Protestant Revolution called the epistle of James, "an epistle of straw" - probably because he could not reconcile the teaching here of James with the teaching of Paul.

The answer can be found in looking at this saving by grace through faith as a two sided coin. You cannot try to chalk up more "good points" than "bad points" and turn to God and say, "Okay, because of my more good points you have to give me eternal life, I have earned it." Many Jews had a religion of just that - working at collecting more good marks than bad marks, so getting saved by works. Paul argued that just was not the way to eternal life. You could only be saved by being forgiven your sins, and that only through the life and blood of Jesus Christ.

On the other side, to accept Jesus as Savior, but to say that faith in Him then made it possible to continue to sin at will, just live any kind of life style, including having a respect of persons attitude (first part of James 2), was not the true faith of God at all. And God would not accept that kind of faith. The true faith in God and Christ, as Abraham had, LED to a CHANGE in living, led to a change in mind and attitude, of wanting to do the will and works of God. Believing in God is not just a mental throwing of the switch in the mind that says, "Yes, I believe the creation around proves there is a God." The demons and the Devil himself, KNOW there is a God in heaven, and Jesus is at His right hand. But their minds are not changed to DO THE WILL AND WORKS OF GOD! Such a faith in God is a DEAD faith. A technicality of

the mind, admitting there is a God, but not willing to go any further, is NOT a faith that God will recognize and honor and show mercy to.

You are not saved by collecting more good works than bad works, earning your salvation. You are saved by God forgiving you your sins through Christ Jesus' sacrifice and work as High Priest, but your faith in that only way to be saved, must have an attitude of mind with it that WANTS, DESIRES, is WILLING to WALK in the ways of the Lord. It is a FAITH that produces works, the works of God. It is an attitude of mind that is HUMBLE, SUBMISSIVE, to God, an attitude of mind that is willing to be LED by the Spirit of God, willing to be CORRECTED, and just wanting to live as God wants all of His children to live.

Works cannot save you. Grace through faith saves you, but faith must go FORWARD from there and produce the works of Jesus. We must live by the faith OF Jesus (Galatians 2:20), we must have the MIND of Christ in us (Philippians 2:5). True faith in God AUTOMATICALLY brings with it the righteous works of God. The faith of Christ in us, cannot be any other way than living as Christ lived while walking this earth for 33 years. Jesus said it was His will to do the Father's will.

God will not JUSTIFY any person - God will not FORGIVE, show mercy to anyone, who will not REPENT and BE WILLING to live His holy and righteous way of life. That in a nutshell is what James is teaching here in verses 14-26. To believe God exists but to go no further in living God's way of life, as amplified in His holy Word the Bible, will not justify your position with Him, for you to be granted forgiveness and be given eternal life.

Once more I ask the reader to study and mediate on my article "Saved by Grace."

James 3

Sad to say, but far too many people of themselves, decide to be a teacher of God's word. They sit down at some point in their lives, and say, "I think I will go to Theological School and become a minister." Or they may not go that far, but simply say, "I will teach the word of God. I will set myself up as a Theological teacher of the Bible."

Sorry to say, way too many people do exactly that. They may have a "knack" to converse with people, to "lead" people, to "sermonize" - they may have the "gift of the gab" as they say, and yes, they are able to get people flocking to hear them. Many are paid for their efforts, groups here and there bringing them in to speak to them. People praise them, give them applause, stand in awe of them, and sometimes even the world at large, will praise them for their religious preaching and teaching, giving them an "honourary" this or "honourary" that.

The chilling words of Jesus are still recorded in the Gospels. Talking to His followers, He said, "Beware when men speak well of you, for so they did unto the false prophets of old."

Frankly, the person who stands on the very truth of God's word, who is not afraid to tell it as it is, to call a spade a spade, who will at times cry aloud and spare not, and tell my people their sins, who will openly teach and preach ALL that is written in the word of the Lord, that person, OFTEN, will not be liked by the masses, not be liked

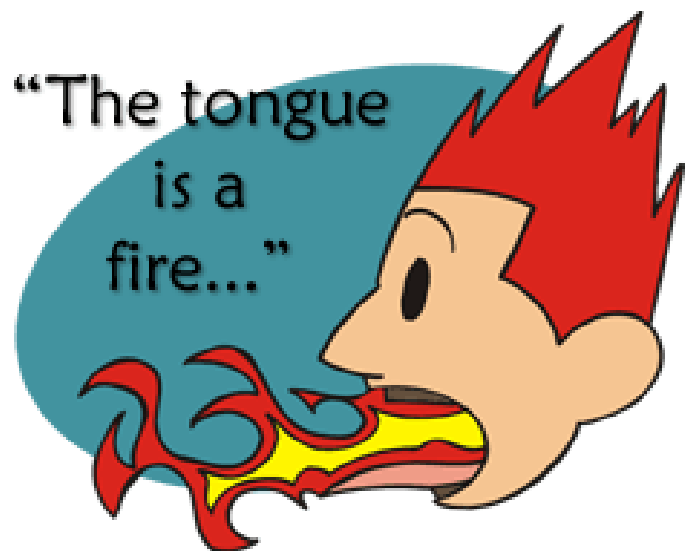
by the majority of the Christian world, and will certainly not be endorsed by the world at large.

James in the opening verse of chapter three, pointedly and bluntly says, "My brethren, do not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive the greater judgment."

It is a **SERIOUS MATTER** to decide you will teach the **WORD** of God. You better know what you are doing, and what judgment you will be under. You better be a serious student all of your life, in the word of God, you better be willing to be **CORRECTED**, to **GROW IN GRACE AND KNOWLEDGE!**

I personally, in my many years with the Lord, and rubbing sleeves with other religious teachers, and those who would be teachers, have found very few who are willing to stand alone, willing to be corrected, who love to grow in grace and knowledge. Very few will step away from their "organization" and from the praise of men.

And in all of this is the **MOUTH!** Some people love to talk, love to stand and talk to others, love the up-front-ism of it all, love the praise of men. A little member of the body is the tongue, but as James points out, what a **FIRE** it can kindle. It can indeed be a world of iniquity. Oh, it does not have to be an outright plain diatribe of evil words. It can be sweet, and have pleasant phrases, eloquence of the English language (or any other language).



We can bless the heavenly Father, with our words, sound real good to the ears of people listening, but then teach false lies of theology and bring deception and evil to many.

James says the tongue can be an unruly evil, full of deadly poison, that mankind of themselves cannot tame. It takes the power and Spirit of God to tame and control the tongue and words that come from us.

Also, you need to remember, that words you read in a book or article, are really the words of the tongue of that individual. Again, some words can be very sweet as you read. The person writing can have a way with words that would get them an award for English literature. If it's in the religious world they can sooth or transport you into warm sunny sand beach resort of deception.

I have nothing per se against the use of English prose, but overall, as one writer did note, Jesus' words were uncomplicated and down to earth clear. As Paul told the church at Corinth, "And brethren, when I came to you, I came not with excellency of

speech my speech and my preaching, was not with enticing words of man's wisdom...." (1 Corinthians 2:1,4).

So, we must evaluate the words of men, by not only their actions, the follow-up on their words, but what they say and what they write, if on theological matters, must be according to the law and the testimony - God's word (see Isaiah 8:20).

You are never off the hook, as to the correctness, good or evil, that comes from the mouth and tongue of people. You are never off the hook as to the good or evil that comes from your mouth or your pen (verses 2-12).

James ends his thought in this chapter, by taking us to what is the wisdom in it all, the end of it all is having the correct and right wisdom, that will show forth a good conduct in life, which will be coupled with meekness. If there is bitter envyings and strife in your hearts, you better not glory, for you will only continue to deceive yourselves about the truth. That kind of wisdom is only from the world, even could be from the demons. James adds. Where there is envy and strife, there is confusion and all kinds of evil work.

True wisdom James says, is from ABOVE, it is PURE, PEACEABLE, GENTLE, EASY TO BE ENTREATED, FULL OF MERCY AND GOOD FRUITS. It is without WRANGLING, and without any HYPOCRISY - play acting.

Over it all as like a roof over a house or building, is righteousness, but the fruit of righteousness is sown in PEACE of them that make peace (verses 13-18).

Jesus said, "Blessed are the PEACEMAKERS, for they shall be called the CHILDREN OF GOD" (Matthew 5:9).

Jesus was in the main a loving, PEACEFUL man. He got tough at times to those He needed to get tough with. But He was a man of Peace - He was living in peace and harmony with the Father, He wanted people to have peace, to feel peace in their heart and mind. His whole life was about PEACE, the peace of knowing the true God, finding salvation, and living then for eternity in the PEACEFUL family of God.

I have a full in-depth study for you called "BEING A PEACEMAKER." Look it up and see how important it is for your Christian life.

CHAPTER 20

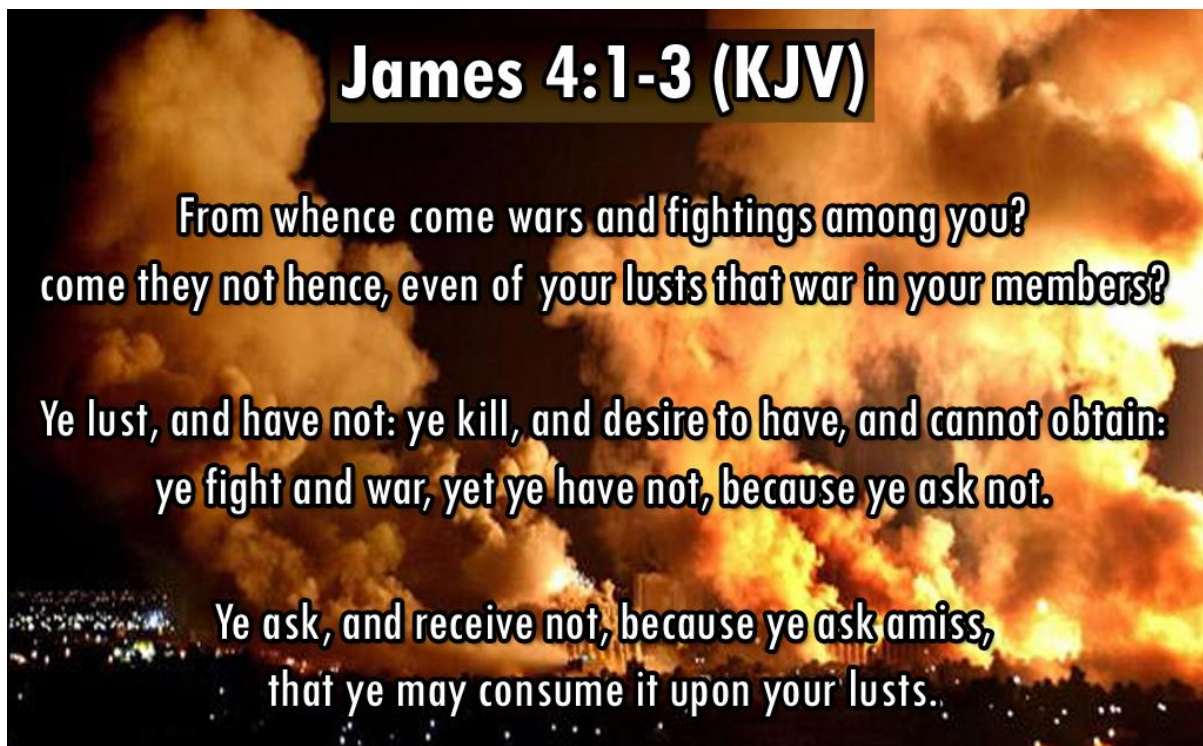
THE EPISTLE OF JAMES (PART 3)

James 4

The Greek word "war" in verses one and two, also proves James was writing to a large general population of the scattered twelve tribes of Israel (chap.1:1) - scattered throughout the Roman Empire.

The word "war" in verse one is "polemos" - number 4171 in Strong's Concordance. The ENGLISHMAN'S GREEK CONCORDANCE shows this word as used everywhere in the New Testament. It is used in Matt. 24:6; Mark 13:7; Luke 14:31; 21:9; 1 Cor.14:8; Heb.11:34; Rev. 9:7,,9; 11:7; 12:7,17; 13:7; 16:14; 19:19; 20:8. It is translated as "war" - "fight" - "battle." in the KJV. In every case in the New Testament, it is used as meaning the literal fighting, battles, warfare among armies. There should be therefore no reason to try and make it mean something else in James 4:1.

The Greek for "war" in verse 2 is akin to "polemos" - it is "polemeo" number 4170 in Strong's Concordance - and is used in the New Testament in only these places: Rev.2:16; 12:7; 13:4; 17:14; 19:11. Once more it means the literal war, fight, fought, as armies warring against each other. There should be no reason to try and say it means something else here in James 4:2.



Using only the New Testament to interpret itself, the New Testament uses the words to literally mean warfare as we think of it in the normal sense - groups of people or angels or God against man, in literal battles and warfare.

All of verses one to ten prove James was now addressing a majority people of the tribes of Israel, who were at times, fighting, warring, and battling, either each other or other nations around them where they were scattered. They had a form of religion only, but no real substance, their fightings were from their basic lustful nature.

They maybe asked God this or that, but it was an asking based on their lusts. They were asking amiss, they didn't receive, and so their lustful desires led them to warfare. James says they were part and parcel of the world around them, they were a friend of the world, they walked in the ways of the world, hence they did what the world does - get what you think you need even if it means going to war over it. They were allowing the bad side of our natural spirit in us, to lead them off into wars, fighting, and battles. Their religion led them to ask, but they were asking for the wrong things.

A whole new mental attitude was need on their part. They needed HUMILITY! They needed to get rid of their vain proudness, and if they were to receive the grace of God, meekness and humility was surely needed from their hearts and minds. It was just a fact of recorded Scripture that God resists the PROUD, but gives GRACE to the HUMBLE (verses 1-6; and see Job 22:29; Ps.138:6; Prov.3:34; Matt.23:12).

According to James through the next verses those Israelites needed DEEP repentance, mourning, weeping, and humility. He pulls no punches, puts the cards on the table, calls it like it clearly was, and gives them the changes they needed to make in their lives.

"SUBMIT yourselves therefore to God. RESIST the Devil, and he will flee from you. DRAW NIGH to God, and He will draw nigh to you. CLEANSE your hands, you SINNERS; and PURIFY your hearts, you double-minded. BE AFFLICTED, and MOURN and WEEP, let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. HUMBLE yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He shall lift you up (verses 7-10, KJV).

Truly James' words are a call to DEEP REPENTANCE. Truly many in scattered Israel needed to hear that call. Indeed sometimes the servants of the Most High have to cry aloud and spare not, and have to show the people of God their sins.

Many of those Israelites were also speaking evil against one another. This is the evil of malice, gossip, hurtful words, words that edified no one. There is a kind of talk that Christians should not partake in. When talking about someone is done to cut them to pieces, to trample them into the dust, to falsely accuse, to blame of sinning against the law of God, when there is no clear evidence such evil talk, is condemning, and you are being judge over someone, when you have no right to be their judge. There are some situations that you should have nothing to do with or nothing to say about, because you simply do not have the facts. You should be busy doing the law, and not being a judge using the law to speak against someone in a wrong way.

There are times to judge. Paul did so in 1 Corinthians 5, which we have looked at already, when we went through that epistle of Paul's. Jesus said we are to judge RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT. It is an important topic, that of judging. I have written an in-depth study on the matter. Please look it up and take the time to fully study the matter.

God is the final judge of everyone. He is the one who gave the law - He is the GREAT lawgiver. He is the one to save or destroy. James is addressing people who were judging and condemning incorrectly and unrighteously.

Yes, this matter of judging is a serious and important issue that the Bible has much to say about, so please take the time to read and study my article covering this subject (verses 11-12).

To finish this chapter James addresses those individuals who are self-pompous, overly self-confident, arrogantly proud, who think the world revolves around them. They think and plan as if they are immortal flesh, the attitude they have is what is to be blamed here. Of course it is not wrong to look ahead, and have some basic outline of what you want to accomplish in life, but it should all be in a humble frame of mind, with an attitude of "God willing" I would like to do this or that. We are to remember our life is like a vapour, we are only here for a relatively short span of time in the eternity of God.

Some, James knew, were rejoicing in their cocky mind-set concerning life, they were in a wrong boastful attitude, and James said that kind of living was evil (verses 13-16).

He also knew that many he was writing to, KNEW BETTER! And when a person has been enlightened, then to turn from the light and carelessly ignore it or throw it away, or set your mind to NOT walk in the light, then it is SIN indeed for that person. As Jesus said, "To whom much is given much is required."

It is a wonderful prize to have, is the prize of having more light revealed to you, having more "good" manifested to you, but once it is given it is your grave responsibility to DO that which is right. To NOT do so is sin, and as we have heard from James, sin, when it is finished, brings forth DEATH (verse 17 with chapter 1:15).

James 5

Verses 1-6 of this chapter are also proof that James is writing to a large population - the twelve tribes of Israel scattered. His scathing remarks towards the physically wealthy are blunt and pointed. We would hope that they are addressed towards un-Godly and un-Christian people. Although Paul had to pointedly address the sins of some Christians in his epistles, James here gives no hint that he is talking to some in the Christian church. It is best to conclude James is talking to the general "wealthy" population of the twelve tribes, many or most, of which were not following godly principles of living.

It would seem that there was a major "task-master" attitude by the rich to take advantage of the poor, many of which were Christians.

Look at how James starts: "Come now, you rich, WEEP and HOWL for your miseries that are coming upon you." Then he proceeds to tell them their riches have rotted, and their garments moth-eaten, their gold and silver is corroded. Now it really takes something mighty drastic to corrode gold, but I suspect it is a figure of speech James uses to nail home how bad things are with the rich, and the corrosion within their

heaped up treasures, will be their witness against them, of their attitude towards their riches and the abuse of the poor that made them rich.

These greedy task-masters of the poor, had not done what was right and proper concerning the wages to be paid to their poor workers. Whatever the fraud was that they enacted as they manipulated the wages of those they employed, that fraudulent sin had reached up to heaven, along with the cries of the poor who were being monetarily abused.

James tells them that they have lived on earth in pleasure and luxury (margin - indulgence). They lived lives of continual feasting, maybe literally, but figuratively for certain. What they have done towards the poor amounted to the likes of condemning and murder, yet those just and righteous ones did not resist them (verses 1-6).

Obviously there was a large problem out there among the scattered twelve tribes of Israel. The rich by and large were taking great advantage of the relatively poor people that they employed.

James admonishes those Christians employed by the rich: "Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand" (verses 7-8). At the time of James' writing the early apostles thought the coming of the Lord in glory to establish the Kingdom of God on earth, was not far away. By the time Paul wrote some of his epistles certain prophetic passages had been revealed to him and they knew some events had to yet take place before Jesus was to return. But still, I doubt any of them would have expected the past two thousand years to have gone by, and still we expect the coming of the Lord is at hand. Such is the nature of time in the presence of God, two thousand years to Him is but a twinkling of an eye in endlessness eternity.

The Christians were not to complain and grumble against one another. When you are being mistreated by rich employers, it is easy to complain and grumble, even to the point of grumbling between each other, finding fault in this way or that way with each other. We are not to get into that bad attitude with one another because we shall be judged by THE judge of the universe who is standing at the door, a way of saying He is standing nearby.

James points them to the prophets of old, who came in the name of the Lord. He points them to the suffering they had to endure at times, and how they patiently bore it all. He reminds them that we counted them very blessed, those who set us that example of patient endurance. We think of the great Job and his endurance under mighty trials, and we have seen the end intended, the finished product, of the Lord - that the Lord is very compassionate and great in mercy (verses 9-11).

It was Paul who wrote that the Lord will not allow trials and tests to come upon us that we cannot endure, but will with those trials and troubles, make a way of escape, give us the strength to bear with them. Again the classic example is that of Job. I ask the reader to read the book of Job in a modern translation, which will bring to light that book in a much more revealing way than the old KJV.

James gives instructions as Jesus did, about "swearing" and "oaths" (verse 12). Under the New Testament swearing by oaths for Christians has indeed been "done away with." Some people like to think that just about everything under the Old Covenant has been "done away with" under the New Covenant. That is of course far from the truth, but on the other hand SOME things under the Old have been abolished under the New. This is one of them (swearing and taking oaths by this method or that method) - oath swearing should not be practiced by Christians. You can "affirm" - say YES or say NO, but things like swearing on the Bible should not be done by Christians. Many of you may be surprised that our laws of the Western world allow for "affirmations" in the courts of the land.

I once needed to be in court as a witness (nothing drastically serious, I've even forgotten what it was all about now), and whoever they are, handed me the Bible to put my hand on and swear that I would tell the truth and nothing but the truth so help me God. I told the person I would affirm, but not with any hand on the Bible. They blinked their eyes, and repeated their words again as they handed me a Bible. I said the same thing, that I would affirm. The person hesitated for a moment this time, looked a little puzzled, and then again started to repeat their speech as they hand me the Bible once more. I again told them I would affirm this time they really were confused, looked down, looked up, and looked over at the Judge. With a sigh from the Judge like "Don't you know he is allowed to affirm and not swear on the Bible" the Judge said out loud, "He will AFFIRM, he's allowed to do this."

Oh, interestingly, the Judge did ask me where I got this from, not swearing on the Bible. I was able to tell all present the passages of James and of Jesus (Jesus instructed it in Matthew 5:34-37).

Kind of simple really, but many Christians just do not take the words of Jesus and James in any serious practical daily manner. I'm not sure what they think Jesus and James were teaching, if it was not plainly DO NOT SWEAR OR TAKE OATHS, PERIOD!

Some things HAVE CHANGED from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant, but you need to be very careful about WHAT. I have an in-depth study called "LIVING BY EVERY WORD OF GOD - HOW?" You need to look it up and study it carefully.

If we are suffering from anything, James tells us to pray about it. If we are cheerful, to sing psalms or songs of praise. A psalm is words of praise, a way of telling God you are thankful. This can be done with many types of songs, they do not have to be so-called "religious songs" - many songs can have words of praise and joy and thankfulness in them. It is much harder today to find those songs outside of the religious world, as so many of today's songs are full of this trash and that trash, this moaning and this bad experience or heartbreak, "She done left me, and my dog ran away and I'm now so blue, so blue, as I cry in my beer, away from you."

If people are sick, they are to call for the ElderS (note the plural) of the church and they are to come and anoint them with oil and pray for them. Again, kind of simple, but few churches practice this admonishing teaching today (verses 13-14).

Verse 15 has given some people a hard time, they are practically smashed to bits when God does not heal, and lets the person die. The words say, "And the prayer of

faith WILL save the sick, and the Lord WILL raise him up, and if he has committed sins, he WILL be forgiven."

Looking at the whole Bible, if we are reading ALL of it, we shall see that at times people are not healed, they must endure with their sickness of whatever sort it is, or they may not be raised up but do indeed die. Paul had a thorn in the flesh that he asked the Lord three times to remove, but God did not remove it, and told him that His grace was sufficient for him - God would give Paul the strength to endure his thorn in the flesh.

The answer to this verse in James is understanding the Bible uses, over and over again, GENERAL STATEMENTS! We use this language even today in our speech. "What a lovely day it has been" we may say at the end of the day, even though there was a few times a dark cloud came over and dumped a good rain shower on us, while enjoying a family picnic.

I refer the reader to my in-depth study called "General Statements" which will show you how the Bible uses the speech tool known as general statements.

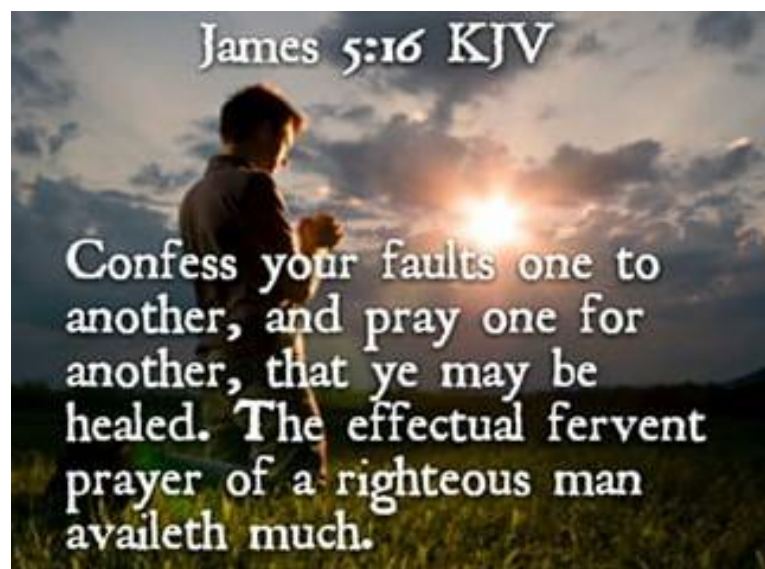
James is using a general statement here. Quite often, probably most of the time, God does heal after anointing with oil and prayer, BUT NOT EVERY TIME. For whatever reasons God may choose not to heal that person, they may have to live with their sickness, as Paul had to live with his thorn in the flesh, or they may even die! We do look to God in faith, that He will answer in the way He decides to answer our prayer.

All this does not say we should not fervently pray, for James in the next verse (verse 16) says we should talk to each other about our weakness and sickness and pray for each other that we will be healed. The effectual fervent pray of a righteous man does avail much.

You will notice the confessing of our faults and sins to each other here mentioned, is in the CONTEXT of physical sickness - James is not teaching the spiritual "confessing box" to a church priest, that one particular denomination uses.

The example James gives is that of the prophet Elijah. He was a human man, as we are, with the same pulls of the flesh as we have. But he EARNESTLY prayed that it would not rain in Israel, and it did not rain for three and one half years (1 Kings 17:1; 18:1). And he prayed again and the heavens gave rain (1 Kings 18:1,42).

So, fervent prayer can bring mighty results.



We should use earnest heartfelt prayer, but remember God is the one to give His answer WHEN and HOW he sees fit (verses 17-18).

James ends his epistle with a reminder of TWO things. One, it is possible for someone to TURN FROM the truth. They had the truth, but they have now wandered from it. And it is good for someone to try and bring them back to that truth, to save their lives once more, to help them re-direct their way of life BACK AGAIN to the truth of God.

Paul talked about this in Galatians 6:1-3. The person trying to restore someone back to the faith should be doing it all in MEEKNESS, HUMILITY, and not in some vain, arrogant, self-righteous mind-set.

Yes, at all times we need to NOT think of ourselves MORE than we should, we need to live and walk, and act in words and deeds with HUMILITY, and if we do, then God can use us to serve and help people, bring salvation to people, and what greater work can there be than to help people find eternal truth and salvation. May it be what we are all about (verse 19-20).

CHAPTER 21

THE 1ST EPISTLE OF PETER (PART 1)

Introduction

The following is taken from the NKJV Personal Study Edition, Nelson Publishers, 1990, 1995.

The name of Simon Peter is mentioned in the New Testament more than any of the other disciples, and even more than the name of the apostle Paul. This letter is the first of two epistles in the Bible that bear Peter's name.

AUTHOR AND DATE

Some scholars have doubted that Peter wrote this letter. They claim that the good style and extensive literary vocabulary of the author could not have come from a Galilean fisherman. Nevertheless, there are strong reasons for believing that Peter is the author. The epistle contains references to events in Jesus' life and to His words. Scholars have also pointed out similarities between 1 Peter and Peter's speeches in Acts.....

Peter's scribe, Silvanus (5:12), may have been responsible for much of the style and vocabulary. He probably applied his editorial skills to convey the message, personality, and apostolic authority of Peter the apostle.

It is natural to identify Peter's scribe with the Silvanus of Paul's letters (2 Cor.1:19; 1 Thess.1:1; 2 Thess.1:1). Silvanus is the Latin and Silos the Greek form of the same Aramaic name. He is probably the same person as the Silas who accompanied Paul in Acts 15-18.

First Peter was probably written shortly before the beginning of Nero's persecution of Christians at Rome in A.D.63 or 64.....

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

The Christians who received this letter lived in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (1:1), regions located in what is today Turkey or Asia Minor. Paul founded churches in Galatia and Asia. However, it is possible that those addressed in this letter lived in the northern part of Turkey or Asia Minor and were never visited by him.

Our knowledge of these Christians is limited. Many of them seem to have been Gentiles (see 1:18; 2:10). It appears that they were facing persecution from non-Christians around them and perhaps also from government officials. This epistle was written primarily to bring them a message of hope and encouragement under such persecution. Much of it reads like a sermon written to remind Christians of their conversion, the privileges they have in Christ, and the holy lives they are to live.

CONTENTS

Peter thanks God for the plan of salvation which has become a reality in the lives of his readers (1:3-12). He exhorts them to live holy lives (a prominent theme of the epistle), to love, and to desire God's word (1:13-2:3). They are part of the living temple of God founded on Christ (2:4-10).

Peter tells them how Christians should conduct themselves in various social relationships (2:11-3:12). In every situation they should return good for evil.

He has much to say about the sufferings of Christians and of Christ (3:13-4:19). Christ's suffering is an example of what His followers may well face because they do what is right; it

is also the means by which they are delivered from sin. If they continue to follow Him, there is a sure hope of final triumph.

Peter concludes with instructions to church leaders, as well as to Christians in general, and gives final greetings (5:1-14).

OUTLINE OF 1 PETER

1. Salutation 1:1,2
2. The Christian's sure hope 1:3-12
 - A. Peter gives thanks for salvation 1:3-5
 - B. Christians rejoice in redemption 1:6-9
 - C. The prophets foresaw this salvation 1:10-12
3. Christian conduct 1:13-2:10
 - A. Be holy 1:13-21
 1. Because God is holy 1:13-16
 2. Because Christ has redeemed you 1:17-21
 - B. Love one another 1:22-25
 - C. Desire God's word 2:1-3
 - D. Remember you are God's people 2:4-10
4. Christian social relationships 2:11-3:12
 - A. Christians and unbelievers 2:11,12
 - B. Christians under government 2:13-17
 - C. Christians as employees 2:18-25
 - D. Christians in the family 3:1-7
 - E. Christlikeness when wronged 3:8-12
5. Christian suffering 3:13-4:19
 - A. Let suffering come for doing good 3:13-17.
 - B. Follow Christ's example 3:18-22
 - C. Abstain from evil 4:1-6
 - D. Support each other 4:7-11
 - E. Rejoice in suffering 4:12-19
6. Christian leadership 5:1-5
7. Final Christian counsels 5:6-11
8. Farewell 5:12-14

1 Peter 1

Peter declares he is an "apostle" of Jesus Christ - apostle simply means "one sent forth." From chapter 5:13 we see that Peter was in faraway Babylon (and that is not some name representing Rome as some would have you believe). Peter the apostle did NOT establish the church in Rome as the Roman Catholic church would like you to believe.

He writes to the "strangers" in the areas he mentions in verse one. And that is interpreted for us in chapter 2:10-12 as people which only now have God, so the main people he wrote to were Gentiles, living among Gentiles.

They were ELECTED as God had indeed planned to call Gentiles to His salvation, in the overall plan of calling and electing. We have covered this in past chapters, where the NT church came to see the prophets of old foretelling the calling of Gentiles to salvation for the first resurrection at the coming of the Lord Jesus.

They were also called or elected by the setting apart from the Holy Spirit, and notice that was "unto OBEDIENCE" - there is "obeying" God involved in being elected to be a Christian, and that election includes the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.

As the apostle Paul taught in his epistle to the Romans, you are saved by BOTH the blood of Jesus and by His life - Romans 5:10.

The Father and Jesus as blessed (notice - nothing said about the Holy Spirit – Peter was silent in his greetings in regards to the Holy Spirit as was Paul in all of His epistles. If the Holy Spirit is some third Personal Being of a Trinity God, Peter obviously knew nothing about such an idea). He tells his readers they are BEGOTTEN AGAIN, yes begotten not yet "born" - and we have studies to prove the difference - we are as flesh and blood Christians, BEGOTTEN of God, and we shall be BORN of God at the resurrection.

Those who understand the logic of the human begettal and birth KNOW it is a TWO phased process. So is our spiritual begettal and birth. I refer you to the in-depth studies on my website for the truth of the matter concerning the Christian BEGETAL and BIRTH.

We are begotten again unto a LIVING HOPE by and through the RESURRECTION of Jesus Christ from the dead. As Paul explained in 1 Corinthians 15, if Jesus had not been resurrected then our faith would be in vain. The sure hope of the Christian is a RESURRECTION, not some immortal soul. As Jesus is ALIVE today, then we can be alive in the future, if we die, before the day Jesus returns to earth.

Our inheritance is incorruptible, will never fade away, and is now RESERVED in heaven for us. But Jesus will bring that inheritance with Him, when He comes in glory to raise the dead and to establish the Kingdom of God on earth. Peter does NOT say we shall go to heaven to obtain our inheritance.

We are today kept by the power of God through faith, unto the final day of salvation which will be revealed in the last time. At the end of this age, glorious salvation will be openly revealed to the world, when Jesus will return and raise His followers, the children of God, from the dead, and change in the twinkling of an eye from mortal to immortal, those alive at His coming (read again the wonderful 1 Corinthians chapter 15).

We rejoice in all of this, though for a time, in this life, we may have troubles and trials. But the trying of our faith is to be looked upon as a precious thing, more precious than gold that can perish. We may go through trials that are like metal put through the fire to purify it, but beyond it all, there will be praise and HONOR and GLORY, at the appearing of Jesus Christ.



Peter realizes most or all of the people he is writing to, have never seen Jesus. So it is with us today, but we still believe, and we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. We know the outcome, the goal, the end result of our faith is the salvation of our lives.

And concerning this SALVATION the prophets of old desired and loved to look into, as it was revealed to them by the Spirit of Christ. They were able to testify long before it happened, the sufferings of Christ, and also the glory that should follow. They were not just writing about things for themselves, but for US, so the things that Peter said were NOW being reported about in his time, were true and the good news inspired to be preached through the power of the Holy Spirit. And so great was all this teaching about the salvation of God, even the angels desired to look into with wonderment (verses 1-12).

Yes, angels, must be awe-stuck at how God planned to reproduce Himself, through human flesh and blood, how the one now known as Jesus the Christ, was willing to come from heaven as a member of the very Godhead, come as a human person, fight against sin and the Devil, live a perfect sinless life, be willing to suffer terrible death on a cross, have His blood shed for all sins of all people from all ages. Lay dead for three days and three nights, then be resurrected to eternal glorified life by the Father, and go back to heaven to sit on the Father's right hand as the interceding High Priest for God's children.

The angels must have then and so still today, be awe-stuck, by this plan of salvation that the Godhead planned before the world was made.

It truly is mind-bending when you stop and meditate on it all, and as Paul said, we really look through a glass darkly at it all, but one day we shall know as we are known. One day we shall see the full glorified reality of it all. There is nothing more important in your life, than to let God's Spirit lead you to be one of His elected, to be one of His very children, to live for Him, to serve Him, to walk with Him, to love Him with all your heart, mind, and life. You can, if you heed His calling, can be in the first resurrection of glory, at the very coming of Christ Jesus.

As Peter pleads in verses 13-21.

"Wherefore gird up the loins (THOUGHTS) of your mind, be SOBER (mentally, emotionally), and HOPE to the end for the GRACE that is to be brought unto you at the REVELATION (REVEALING IN GLORY) of Jesus Christ; As OBEDIENT children, not fashioning yourselves according to the FORMER LUSTS in your ignorance. But as He which has called you is HOLY, so be you HOLY also in all manner of CONDUCT; because it is written 'Be you Holy; for I am Holy'" (Lev.11:14). And if you call on the Father, who without RESPECT OF PERSONS judges according to everyman's work, pass the time of your living here in fear (humble and deep respect of the Almighty One). For you do know that you were not REDEEMED with corruptible things, as like silver and gold, from your vain conduct (useless and no good conduct as far as finding salvation) received by following the traditions of your family (parents, and associates of this world). But you were REDEEMED by the PRECIOUS BLOOD of Christ, as of a Lamb WITHOUT BLEMISH and WITHOUT SPOT (pure and wholesome in every way possible, who never sinned). Who truly was FOREORDAINED BEFORE the foundation of the world (God the Father and He had decided before the earth was founded, Jesus would come to earth as a human

and die for the sins of the world), but that plan came to fruition in these last times for you and for me. Who through Him (Christ) we do believe in God, who RAISED Him up from the DEAD, and gave Him GLORY; that your FAITH and HOPE might be in God the Father (verses 13-21 - my translation and amplification).

What indeed a wonderful plan of salvation God and Christ had planned before the earth was formed. There would be a calling and an election according to grace, a redeeming or buying back, from sin and death, for those called and chosen. It would be done through grace (undeserved forgiveness of sins) by the blood or death of Jesus on the cross. And we do believe God did raise Christ from the dead and gave Him eternal glory. And because He lives we also can live in glory in the family of God.

Peter was confident that the people he was writing to had purified their lives in OBEYING the TRUTH, by and through the power of the Spirit of God, which also leads people to a sincere love of all their brethren, and they were to continue in loving each other with a pure heart - and they were to do it FERVENTLY, because they had been begotten again not of corruptible seed, but of INCORRUPTIBLE seed through the WORD of God, which lives and abides FOREVER. Yes, God's begetting seed, the Holy Spirit and His forever living Word in the Bible, are the agents that come into the mind, that unite with the human mind, and DO BEGET us as the VERY CHILDREN of God.

This BEGETAL is just as REAL as when a baby is begotten by its physical parents. The teaching of the whole New Testament is that God is REPRODUCING Himself, begetting flesh and blood human beings, and so making real spirit united CHILDREN. Over and over again, the New Testament says God, the Most High One, IS OUR FATHER, Jesus His firstborn Son from the dead, is our ELDER BROTHER. Jesus is not ashamed to call us His brothers (Hebrews 2). We are NOT "adopted" as God's children (which is a wrong translation in a few verses of the NT) - we are LITERAL SONS and DAUGHTERS of God our Father.

We are made sons by things that will never pass away. Our physical flesh is as the flower of the grass. The grass and its flowers come up by they fall away, they die and are no more. But the WORDS of God ENDURE FOREVER, and that Word of the GOOD NEWS (the gospel) IS PREACHED UNTO YOU (verses 13-25).

On my RESTITUTION OF ALL THINGS website, the very GOSPEL of Jesus Christ is preached to those who visit the site. You are learning about the mysteries of God that He WANTS you to KNOW and UNDERSTAND - the VERY PLAN OF SALVATION - the WAY INTO the very Kingdom or Family of God. The Gospel - the good news - of the true way to find eternal life, is here laid out before you in plain clear language. The WAY of LIFE the Father wants you to live, the WAY of WORSHIPPING Him, SERVING Him, SERVING YOUR FELLOW MAN, is being expounded to you.

If you have not yet done so, you need to HUMBLY REPENT, accept Jesus as your PERSONAL SAVIOR, come to the Father in FAITH, be saved by His GRACE, through faith, in the reconciling sacrifice of Christ Jesus. You need to be willing to OBEY the Father, to now be willing to LIVE by EVERY WORD that comes from Him to you through the pages of the Bible. You need to love the Lord your God with all your HEART, MIND, and LIFE! On my website I teach those who visit HOW TO LIVE

as a true Child of God. Very few Christian websites will give you the plain truth of what God wants you to know from His word. I am at times blunt and to the point concerning the false Christianity out there, I try to be tactful and to do it all in love. Truth is truth, but Jesus said you can know the truth and in so knowing, it would SET YOU FREE. It is the greatest blessing of this life, to KNOW THE TRUTH and to be SET FREE from lies and falsehood and religious deceptions.

May you have the willingness and the love to search the Scriptures daily and to come to see God's marvellous and beautiful truths of His ever-living Word of Light.

CHAPTER 22

THE 1ST EPISTLE OF PETER (PART 2)

1 Peter 2

Because we have been begotten again by the Word of God (chapter 1:23) which is the Gospel, or good news, of how we can enter the Family of God, Peter starts in verse 1 of chapter 2, to say we should then put aside all ILLWILL (malice) and all DECEIT (guile) and PRETENCE (hypocrisy) ENVY and EVIL SPEAKING or back stabbing with malice. Certainly a Christian needs to put away such ways of living that many in the world follow as part of their lives. But we have to guard ourselves, watch ourselves, for if not careful we find we do have ill will against someone, or envy, or malice, or play act, put on an outward show of "religion" when in the presence of certain people where out of their view we speak and act like many unconverted people of the society we live in.

Verse 2 give emphasis to the milk that a new born baby desires, and we all should know how babies desire nourishing milk. So we should desire God's word, love it, want it, drink in of it, desire to grow in grace and knowledge through having it as part of our diet of living. We should indeed know that the Lord is good and gracious, and He was the LIVING STONE, not desired by the many in this world, but He was the CHOSEN ONE, and PRECIOUS in God's sight, and should be in our sight (verses 3 and 4).



We, the children of God, are also living stones, built up as a spiritual house. We are a holy priesthood to God, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, and we are through Jesus Christ very acceptable to the Father.

THE CHIEF PRECIOUS STONE, was foretold in the Scriptures: "Behold, I lay in Zion, a CHIEF CORNER stone, ELECT, PRECIOUS, and he that believes on him shall not be condemned" (Isaiah 28:16).

In verses 7 and 8, Peter draws is specific difference between those that believe on the precious stone and those who have stumbled over that stone (Christ). The difference is "DISOBEDIENCE" - yes, those who have stumbled over the stone which the builders rejected, have showed their folly by being DISOBEDIENT to the WORD of God. Those who have accepted the precious stone, to them that stone

Christ is the HEAD of the corner. He is the head of the church building. There is OBEDIENCE or DISOBEDIENCE in the accepting or rejecting of God, His Word, and Christ.

Most Christians realize, when push comes to pull, or when common human logic is used, that to live as a child of God you must OBEY that God, and His Word tells us HOW to obey Him, how we should live our day to day lives. The main reason people get into the posture of teaching the crazy argument that you do not have to obey the Most High one, is when they are told the Almighty has a law of a Sabbath days' rest, they just do not want to stop working or doing their own thing on the Sabbath day. But as Peter here points out, those who will not accept THE precious stone (Christ) and God the Father, reject them because they want to be DISobedient to them, they want to live, speak, and think, their way, and do not want a God telling them HOW they should live and think.

But Peter says, to the Christians he is writing to (and to Christians since his time), they are a CHOSEN GENERATION, a ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, an HOLY NATION (people), a PURCHASED people (margin of KJV), and that they should show forth the VIRTUES (margin KJV) of Him who has called them out of DARKNESS into His MARVELLOUS LIGHT. We were once not the people of God, but NOW WE ARE. We had NOT obtained mercy, but NOW HAVE obtain MERCY (verses 9-10).

What POWERFUL verses, what a HIGH STANDARD they hold up for the people of God. How anyone can think, after reading these verses that being a child of the Father means you can live any old way you like, is to me incredulous to contemplate. Paul said, "Let this mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5). To have the MIND of Christ will mean you will want to obey and do the will of the Father, that you will think and act as He wants you to think and act, which will be based upon His Word contained in the Holy Bible.

We are PURCHASED with the very blood of Christ to be a Holy people, a Royal Priesthood, of the very highest order imaginable, to the very height of God the Father.

As the apostle Paul admonished in his epistles, so does Peter in verse 11. He beseeches his readers, whom he calls strangers and pilgrims (and we are in this world, strangers to the ways of the world, and as pilgrims we look towards the age to come and the Kingdom of God on earth), to ABSTAIN from fleshly LUSTS, which are ever warring against our lives.

The attraction to follow the world, to do what they do, to speak as they speak, to lust as they lust, is all around us, even more so in today's society. Sexual immorality is everywhere, especially on TV and on the big screen movie theatres. Fornication (sexual intercourse) before marriage is common-place, if you have not had sexual intercourse before marrying, you are looked upon not only as some freak, but as crazy for not indulging in such pleasures of the flesh. Living together with your boyfriend or girlfriend (once in a purer world, known as "shacking up") is so common today it is probably thought of by the younger generation as a part of a natural growing up.

There also many other forms of fleshly lusts, more and more money, bigger and more expensive homes, cars, boats, holidays, bigger TVs and expensive sound

equipment. There is nothing sinful per se in any of those things, but today far too many people lust after such things, they just do not seem to be able to live without them, or be content with ones that are not the big expensive ones. And people have a harder time to draw the line and say enough is enough. Far too many children in the Western world at least, are spoiled rotten, the "things" they have as birthdays and Christmas gifts are truly astonishing. The material world is constantly pushing pushing and still more pushing at us from every corner, from fliers that are ever coming into our mail box, to TV ads, to glitzy store signs and street and highway signs.

Today there are more lusts of the flesh all around us, than ever before in human history. If it was true in Peter's day (and it ever has been for lusts are part of human nature) it surely is more so today in our 21st space, technology and immorality age.

We Christians are to live among the nations of the world in such a way, that even when they may speak evil against us, to the point of calling us evil (the abortionists would call us evil for not agreeing with them that every woman has the right to abortion, and paid for by the state or taxpayers), they will openly see our good works, and when God comes in the day of visitation and judgment on this earth (and/or in the day when they are called to the truth and salvation) they will GLORIFY God, knowing they witnessed true godliness in the lives of Christians they once thought of as evil (verse 12).

Verses 13-17 have at times been misunderstood. Paul said much of the same thing in one of his epistles. We covered that, but it is again important that I once more clarify such verses. Some have thought from these verses that a Christian is to be a foot mat, a door mat, for all governments and those in state or county authority, to trample all over. Some have thought a Christian is to be a nice wet dish-cloth to be used any-old-way by those in authority. If we read the Bible from cover to cover, we shall soon see that nothing could be further from the truth. One main key for Christians of all nations and ages is found in Acts 5:29. God's way of life and His commands come BEFORE any body of men, be it local or national. Then we have Paul, a Roman citizen appealing to the highest court of the Roman Empire, when he felt he needed to. That is all covered in the last chapters of the book of Acts.

When national governments are based upon good decent laws, when they uphold laws that are mainly in line with many of the laws of God (read again Romans 2:14-15 to get the picture of what I'm saying), then indeed respect should be shown towards them, and they are then also acting as stewards of God in the sense that they do punish evil-doers, who are breaking laws that God would agree are good laws to have in any society. God would fully agree that going out and murdering the fellow down the street for the money he has in his wallet, is an evil act that needs to be punished. Having a speed limit for cars etc. on the streets and highways, to protect people from getting seriously injured and even killed, is a good law, that God would agree with.

What Peter (and Paul) is teaching is that a Christian needs to be a respectable citizen when living in a respectable nation. Many do not realize that in the first century A.D. ROME the ROMAN EMPIRE, was a somewhat respectable place overall. They allowed the Jews to FULLY practice their religion, to have their Temple, their Temple priesthood, their sacrificial system, their national Festivals, their weekly Sabbath, and local synagogues, and FREEDOM to travel (remember Pentecost of

Acts 2 - read it again, notice the freedom of travel). All the Roman Empire asked was that the Jews be RESPECTABLE people, good citizens of Rome, and if they were, they had all the religious freedom they could wish for, and they could use the courts of Rome if they needed to, as the apostle Paul did, as covered in the last chapters of Acts.

So people who in the main, should be respected and honored, then respect and honor should go to them. A Christian is not to use his freedom in Christ and freedom under the nation he lives in, to use that freedom as a liberty for a cloak of maliciousness and evil doing. We are not of this world, our world is above in heaven, we are not to be trying to topple governments of this world by the use of evil and sinful ways, to bring about what we may claim is "God's government." God will bring His government to this world in due time, in His time, and in His way (and the prophets of old and the book of Revelation tell us HOW He will do that).

It is like this, there is NO WAY this passage of Scripture can apply to that government brought in by ADOLF HITLER in the 1930s and the terrible EVIL done on the world by Hitler and his Nazi government. No Christian can respect that type of a leader, king, ruler, or whatever title you want to give Hitler. It is beyond all sensible logic to ever think this passage of God's word applies to people like Hitler and his government (and to some others that have come and gone since the time of Hitler).

What can a Christian do if they find themselves living under such evil men as Hitler? They can either stand up for the right, shout it loud and clear, realizing that it may cost them their lives, or they can FLEE!! Get the heck out of that country or Empire. Many people did EXACTLY those two things when Hitler came to power and started his evil upon the Jews and the rest of the world. I suppose there is a third way that Christians can act under such as a Hitler, they can secretly and STRONGLY disagree but choose to stay and try to secretly save the lives of those coming under evil persecution (knowing in so doing they may be found and have to die for what they did). Many during Hitler's rule and the Second World War, did just that, they secretly worked at saving the lives of many Jews. One of the great movies made on the sacrificial life of such people is called "Schindler's List" - if you have never seen it, make sure you rent or borrow it (from someone who has it) and watch it.

No such person as a Hitler, or any such government under such a king or ruler, needs to be respected. Respect and honor must be earned. Peter is teaching that Christians by and large are to be good respectful citizens within a nation or Empire that deserved to be respected. At that time in history, the Roman Empire granted full religious freedom to those under its rule, and that alone should deserve some respect and honor.

Servants, people working for others are to be respectful and subject (again remember Acts 5:29) to their employer, even if some hard-nosed fellows to work for. If you suffer wrongfully because you obey God, be thankful that you are suffering for that which is godliness. If you are doing your work wrongly and you patiently endure grief because of it, that is no real blessing or big deal, there's no feather in your cap for that, but if you DO WELL and you suffer for it, then in God's eyes that is very acceptable and well pleasing to Him.

Again, this does not teach that a Christian MUST continue working for such hard-boiled-eggs of employers. A Christian can decide to find another job, move along,

catch the wagon train and head out somewhere else. But in the meantime, they need to be willing to suffer the wrong while doing the right.

Peter goes on to say, that such suffering for wrong while doing the right, is part of our calling. Christ also suffered wrong, while doing the right. He set us then the example, and we as His followers must follow His example. He did not sin, evil speaking did not come from His mouth. When He was reviled He did not revile back. When He suffered He did not shout threats of revenge and "I'll get even with you someday - you can be assured of that" type of mouthings off. He simply put it all in God's hands knowing God would take care of such people in His time and His way. Jesus bore our sins on the tree, and as we can have our sins forgiven, be dead to sin so to speak, we should then live unto righteousness. And it is by the stripes Jesus took on His body that we can also be healed. We were as sheep going astray, lost, but now we have been found. God the Father has found us, called us, and returned us to THE Shepherd and Bishop (overseer) of our lives (verses 18-25).

God has certainly healed us spiritually through Christ Jesus, we have our sins forgiven through His life and death. Even many times we are healed from our physical sickness through the body of Christ. We have been restored to a oneness with the Father through Christ. We are to be willing to suffer and take some abuse from people at times. There are times we just need to continue doing what is right, not seeking revenge, while people are doing evil towards us. This is the example Jesus left us, as He also suffered wrongly at times for doing what was right.

God will take care of it, WHEN and HOW he sees fit. Twice in my life I came to know how God judges righteously, and both times, I can tell you it can make the hair on your head stand up. The first time was a man who became the head manager of the place I worked for. I knew him for years before, in a casual way (as I was not in his department directly). After he became head of all the departments, he made it known he did not like me and was going to gun me down as they say. He disliked my religion. I finally left that company and moved on. It was years later that I heard he had to have both legs amputated because of whatever problems led to that, and he died from it all.

The second example is even more dramatic. I still have goose-bumps thinking about it. I was done much evil by a man in one of the church congregations I was attending for about 6 months while living in Florida. He and his wife were doing much evil to the whole congregation - it was quite the mess. The whole church was in an emotional mess. I tried to go brother to brother as Jesus said we should. I even wrote a letter to him and his wife to try and mend the situation. It was all to no avail. I finally had no choice but to say to the Lord, "I've done what I can Lord, I must now leave it all in your hands. You know this is evil I am suffering for doing and living the right."

I left Florida and returned to Canada for about 9 months. Then returned for a few weeks to holiday and visit the same church. What a difference as soon as I walked across the parking lot and entered the building. There was PEACE, FRIENDLINESS, and I received a loving and warm welcome.

One of the now leading men said to me, "Have you not heard Keith?"

"Heard what?" I replied, "I've heard nothing from the day I left 9 months ago," I continued.

"Well,(I've left his name out) shortly after you left, he came down with cancer from head to toe, died a terrible death, within a few months. His wife, you'd never know her now, she is humble and quiet as a mouse in the congregation."

And it was so, the man's wife was there, but you'd never have known it. The transformation in her attitude was like night is from day.

I still get chills up my spine just relating this to you. I've never asked the Lord, since that day, to take care of a situation where someone was doing evil to me for living the right. I'm too afraid as to how the Lord may judge righteously - He can be a fearsome God at times, the Old Testament is full of examples to show us that.

On the other hand He is our loving, seeking Father, who goes after us, finds the lost, and brings us to His dear Son who is the Shepherd and overseer of our souls. Praise and honor and glory be to Him.

CHAPTER 23

THE 1ST EPISTLE OF PETER (PART 3)

1 Peter 3

Peter has just finished taking about submitting to Jesus as our example when wrong is done towards us. He now, for a few verses talks to the wives. He tells them they have a role of submission to their husbands. The Greek word is translated in the KJV as "subjection" - it happens to be a Greek word that is a military term, and means "to submit" under the thought as I stated of the military. We already know that a child of God is to obey the Lord before the commands of men, if obeying man would mean we disobey God. The Most High ALWAYS comes FIRST! We know that from the whole Bible, and from the New Testament verses I have quoted already in the last chapter. So we now understand this submission from wives towards their husband, as a willingness to please and serve their husbands in what they may ask or request, as long as it does not mean we disobey God's will and commandments.

If the husband is not a Christian, then the CONDUCT of the wife could very well lead to their husband becoming a Christian. The wife should not try to convert their husband with clever theological debating, or nagging at him about accepting the Lord. Peter says it is chaste conduct coupled with godly fear or respect (towards God and towards their husband). Peter is of course putting all this into the context that their husband is a respectable and quote "good" man, as the world thinks of as "good." Peter is not talking about wives who have abusive (mentally or emotionally or physically, or all three) husbands. That would be a different matter to consider and instruct on. But wives who have nice good husbands, though unconverted, should give respect to their husband, submit, where it does not lead to disobeying God, and should try to win them for Christ with their CONDUCT, not their clever religious arguments. I have personally witnessed that way of life winning over wives' husbands to Christianity. And you must remember the time frame of winning a husband over to Christ, is in the time frame of God, not yourself. You must be patient, live correctly as God would have you live, and put the calling of your husband in the Lord's hands (verses 1-2).

Verse three has been used by some religious groups to teach that women should not wear make-up, or jewelry, or have fancy hairstyles. They teach "the plainer the better" is the better for the Lord, and is doing His will.

Again I will say, this kind of teaching is reading the Bible with tunnel vision or putting on horse side-blinders (so the horse cannot see what is beside him - so no distractions can upset him). When we read the whole Bible we can find many passages where God's people, the women of the Lord, did wear jewelry, and at times, for the right situation, did dress quite fancy indeed. I have covered this subject at length with studies on make-up and jewelry on my website.

Even within this verse itself, we have proof that Peter was not talking against make-up and jewelry per se. For if he was condemning fancy hair styles, jewelry, and make-up, then he was at the same time condemning "or of putting on of apparel." Hence maybe the into "nudist camps and sea-side nudist beaches" have a point.

Peter is actually using a type of a figure of speech. How this verse should be read and understood is: "Whose adorning let it NOT ONLY be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, and of putting on of apparel. BUT IN THE MAIN let it be the hidden person of the heart, that which is not corruptible, even of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of greater price."



This type of figure of speech is used by other writers of other NT books. I cover, with examples, all this in the studies on make-up and jewelry.

Of course the MAIN and MOST IMPORTANT thing to God is that a woman be meek and have a loving, easy, soft going spirit of mind and heart. That kind of character in a woman is of much GREATER price to the Lord than any fancy clothes, hair style, make-up or jewelry she could ever put on. So the emphasis is on THAT great price while NOT condemning the outward appearance of a well-dressed and modest use of the physical things that add to making a woman a woman. God made the female to be naturally pleasant and attractive to the male mind.

It is the use of that attractiveness, how and when and where, that the woman of God needs to use wisdom and judgment. Certainly, make-up, jewelry, clothes, etc. can be used in the wrong manner, but that can also apply to men. The Bible and God teaches over and over again, MODERATION IN ALL THINGS. The books of PROVERBS and ECCLESIASTES are full of the wisdom of BEING and DOING the right things at the right time in the right place, in all the life of a child of God.

If you have questions in your mind about verses 3 and 4 then you need to study the studies on my website under "make-up" and "jewelry."

Peter goes to the examples in the "old time" of the women of God. The main character they had was they adorned themselves with that which is incorruptible, the nature of God, with meekness and a soft lovely spirit. they also respected their husbands, willing to serve them, seeking to do what pleased their husbands within the laws of God. And even at times, doing what Sarah did at times, calling Abraham her husband "lord" or we may say "sir" or "yes dearest" or whatever else comes to your mind that shows not just love but love with respect.

Peter says such an attitude of the Christian woman will stand them in the same company as Sarah, as long as it is coupled with a conduct of life that is "doing well" and with no trembling fearfulness. God wants this overall character of His female children to be with ease, peaceful rest, contentment of mind and loving heart.

Women have in the past ages have been looked upon by the male as the soft gentler sex, in just about every way. So should it be, God wants that attitude of mind from the women of the body of Christ, and I guess especially from the wives, because they will have such an impact on the future generations they help raise, as most of them will become mothers of children.

I was blessed with having a mother that was such a good influence on my life, in so many ways. I think it was through her I learnt that it was fine for a boy/man to cry at times. My mother and I (all through my growing up years) would sit and watch those sentimental movies, just good love stories that they still produce from time to time even today. We would sit there and let the tears flow. She also taught and showed me how a woman should have love and respect for her husband - my Dad. They had 53 years of married life together, and were still the best of friends and sweethearts until she died from a strange painless cancer, which took us all by surprise.

Peter does not forget to pass on some sound instruction to the husbands in verse 7. A husband is to dwell with their wife according to KNOWLEDGE. Yes, they should try to understand how a woman "ticks" - what makes the female "psyche" - women are "wired up" in many ways in the brain different than men. So this should also apply to women - they also should acquire the knowledge of how men "tick over" as we say.

Two recent books (recent in 2007 as I write this) I can highly recommend for acquiring the knowledge of HOW men and women motor along in their inner lives of the natural nature we are created with are: FOR MEN ONLY - a straightforward guide to the inner lives of women - by Shaunti and Jess Feldhahn, published by Multnomah, Sisters, Oregon, USA. And: FOR WOMEN ONLY - what you need to know about the inner lives of men - by Shaunti Feldhahn, Multnomah publishers.

Very fine books indeed, for both husband and wife to well with each other according to knowledge. If those books become one day out of print, hopefully your Public Library will have them.

Husbands are to give HONOR to their wife as unto the physically weaker, but certainly not mentally or emotionally weaker. In some ways different mentally and emotionally, but you could hardly say weaker - different yes, but not weaker. And a woman can be just as strong spiritually as a man, so Peter must have had in mind that women are generally the weaker physically than men, and so respect should be shown. And that respect is give more emphasis by Peter when he states that BOTH

husband and wife are HEIRS together of the GRACE of life - salvation is on equal footing for both.

He ends his thought on this instruction to men that if they remember these things their prayer will not be hindered. It will keep them in the right mind-set that is pleasing to God, and so the union they have with the Lord will have "clear sailing" as we say.

To finish his thoughts off on this section of instruction, Peter says, "Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing. For: 'He who would love life and see good days, Let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit. Let him turn away from evil and do good; Let him seek peace and pursue it. 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.'" (verses 8-12).

Peter quoted Psalm 34:12-16 to give emphasis to what should be the godly person's way of life. Such right living has always been the teaching of the Lord. Basic and simple, yes as Paul once said, "The simplicity that is in Christ Jesus." We are to be loving people, kind, tender, merciful, courteous, careful with our language and what comes out of our mouth, and doing good to those who do evil to us. We need to be a peaceful people, have an overall attitude of wanting to live in peace with those around us. We should live and talk so others say that they are happy to know us.

It is true that we may not win everyone, some, because of our faith, living the Christian life, and believing what we believe, may dislike us, even hate us, and do evil towards us. Peter says that if we suffer for righteousness' sake, we should be happy, and should not fear their terror they may do to us. We should sanctify the Lord in our hearts, and when needed be ready to give an answer to every man that asks us a reason for the hope that is in us. We should give our answer in humbleness and fear (margin: reverence). We need to have a good conscience, that, whereas they speak evil of us, as if we are evildoers, they may in the end be ashamed of themselves, those who accuse us falsely in our conduct of life as we follow Christ.

It is better (if the will of God is that we suffer from those who say we are evil) to suffer for well doing, than for actual evil doing.

Christ also suffered once for the sins of the world, the holy just One, for the unjust, that He might bring us to God the Father. He was put to death in the flesh, being a human being, but He was made immortally alive by the Spirit (God used His Spirit of power to resurrect Jesus from the dead - verses 14-19).

Verses 19 and 20 have been used to try and prove Jesus had an immortal soul, and though His body was put to death, He Himself was still alive, and went to the underworld to preach to the evil spirit beings.

When you understand the truth of the Bible that it teaches no such doctrine as the immortal soul, and so Jesus was indeed very dead for 3 days and 3 nights (72 hours

- Matthew 12:40) then you can understand correctly verses 19,20. It should read this way:

"By which (the Spirit) He went and preached unto the spirits in prison (a limit placed on them - see also 2 Peter 2:4) which sometime were disobedient WHEN once the long suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight lives were saved by water."

WHEN did Jesus preach to the evil spirits? Not while He was dead for 3 days and 3 nights, but He preached to the fallen angels IN THE DAYS OF NOAH, while Noah was building the Ark.



"He went and preached to the spirits in prison, to disobeying ones, when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared (in which a few, that is, eight souls were saved through water)" (1 Peter 3:19-20)

Ah, this verses also proves Jesus was alive before He came to this earth as a human person. A member of the Godhead, through the power of the Spirit of God, came and preached to the fallen angel spirit beings when Noah was building the Ark. What He preached to them we can only guess. Probably, one thing He told them, was that they only had a certain length of time, and then they would be judged, receive their punishment, as the evil people in Noah's days were going to have their punishment. But Peter does not tell us what Jesus preached to them, we can only speculate as to what the preaching contained.

One third of the angels rebelled at some point in the past, and were cast back to this earth, (in one sense as a type of prison), until their judgment day. You can find the truth about that great rebellion in studies on my website.

Peter likens the water of Noah's day to water baptism of Christians. but the saving of Christians is not the water as such, but it is the symbolism of the water that we are put under. The going under the water in baptism is in a figure, the putting away of the sins of the flesh, and a rising to a good conscience, a better way of life towards God, which is given to us by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is now in heaven at the

right hand of the Father, with all angels and all authorities and powers being made subject to Him (verses 21-22).

Jesus had said to His disciples in the Gospels, that if He did not go away (go back to heaven) then the Holy Spirit would not come. But He would go back to heaven and He would send the Holy Spirit. Coming through water baptism, coming up from the water, represents the new life of a Christian, the life of the risen Christ, a life filled with the power of the resurrected Jesus, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The risen Christ who now has all authority subject to Him, will come into those who accept Him as their Savior, who repent, who believe in faith, who go under the water of baptism, and who rise up from that water, having put away sins through Jesus' death for sinners. And who through Jesus' life, as He now lives at the Father's right hand, will have a good conscience, a good conduct of living towards God the Father.

The symbolism of baptism is the reality of the saved Christian. The apostle Paul spent time expounding the symbolism of water baptism in Romans 6. The reader may want to re-examine that chapter before continuing with chapter 4 of 1 Peter.

CHAPTER 24

THE 1ST EPISTLE OF PETER (PART 4)

1 Peter 4

Peter is pretty straight-forward in the first number of verses, to admonish Christians to put away sin. The NKJV translates it thus:

"Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles - when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. In regards to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you. They will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. For this reason the gospel was preached to those who are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit."

Jesus died to save sinners, to forgive sin, and to be raised to sinless immortal life. And those who belong to Christ are then to not live as they did before, in any manner they wanted to, but should now live according to the will of God. And the will of God is found in reading His word, as written in the Holy Bible. The world at large may think your new life and way of living is crazy, and speak of you with evil intent. But God will eventually judge all, those still living and those who have died.

The Gospel was preached to those now dead (in a spiritual sense), so they could change their way of life to be in accord with God. The unconverted world judged those who accepted God's message as religious nuts when they accepted Christ as their personal Savior, but that did not matter, for they knew God judged them as His children, and eternal life through the Holy Spirit will belong to them when it is all said and done.

Anyone reading the New Testament should be able to see quite easily that being with God, being on God's team, means putting away the conduct of life that is not approved by God, that is unrighteousness, that is sin. And the books of the apostles John and James make it clear to see that sin or unrighteousness is that which is breaking the laws, commands, and teachings of the Most High.

Those on God's side know that they do not have to be concerned with what and how man judges them. They know they need to be concerned about how God judged, for eternal life can only come from Him (verses 1-6).

Peter at this time of the first century believed the end of all things, the prophecies of old and the new age to come, was AT HAND. So his warning that Christians should be serious and watchful in prayer (verse 7). I suppose this is a living verse for all ages, as the end of all things is as close as our death. Most of us never know when our time is up on this earth in the physical flesh, so indeed we need to be sober, serious in our faith, and watchful in our prayers. Peter now relates some nuts and bolts of what our active faith should consist of.

"Above all things have fervent love for one another, for love will cover a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without grumbling. As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks let him speak as the oracles (margin - utterances) of God. If anyone ministers (serves) let him do it as the with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion (margin - sovereignty) forever and ever. Amen" (verses 8-11).

Love will overlook wrongs and sins of people that may be done to us. There are some sins that people do to us that just need to slide off us like water off a duck's back. Yes there may be times also that we need to apply the instruction of Jesus as in Matthew 18:15-17. Then there are times that the wrong or sins done towards us need to be ignored, they are not going to hurt anyone else, they are not going to affect anyone else, they will just affect our ego, and we need to cover our ego with love. Of course we need to have wisdom (and we have seen James cover the topic of asking for wisdom) as to when to apply Matthew 18:15, and when to let love cover sins.

Also, if we are a merciful person, willing at times, to let love cover sins, we shall also be shown mercy from our Heavenly Father. The love and mercy we show others will be in measure the love and mercy God will show us. It is as Jesus taught, "If you do not forgive men their sins, neither will God forgive you your sins." It is the principle that we receive what we give, we reap what we sow, we harvest what we plant.

We are to be a hospitable, kind, giving, people to each other, and to do it all without grumbling, the attitude of mind is important to God. We can have an outward conduct of being hospitable, kind, a serving person to others, but inside our mind and heart we are doing it all with resentment, a "gritting our teeth" in a wrong attitude while we are trying to be hospitable. God sees the heart and mind, we may fool others, but the Lord can never be fooled.

If we have a gift, an ability, a talent, we are to use it to serve others, as being a good steward of the grace of God who gave us that gift. It could be a "natural" gift, one that we were born with, or an ability that we acquired sometime during our life time. Either way, we need to be using that gift to help and serve others. I acquired the skill and ability to be an Orthopaedic Shoemaker and Orthotic maker (Arch-support maker in common language) as a young man in my early 20s. I have used that skill to serve people with foot problems. I was musically inclined from birth, and started to learn to play the Guitar from age 11. I went on to play the Steel Guitar, the Banjo, Mandolin, Bass guitar, Classical guitar, and have been using that skill now for 32 years (as I write this in May 2007) to teach others to play those instruments. I have a natural ability with horses, training and riding, both English and Western style, so I have used (still am at this point in my life) that ability to serve others (young and old) in their quest to enjoy horses and ponies.

Whatever your gift or gifts are, God through the apostle Peter, says you are to minister or serve others with that gift. You hear about skilled doctors or surgeons donating their time and talent to go and help people in poor nations, who could never afford to buy their service. That type of giving is very pleasing in God's sight. Maybe not all of are in the position to give ex number of weeks or months to serve as those doctors can, but in one way or another we can all figure out how to serve with our gifts and acquired abilities.

If we speak, as most of us can and do, we should speak all things as with the mind-set that we speak words that are pleasing to God, as if God is giving the utterances. We are back to what James wrote about the tongue, which we have studied when going through the book of James. We need to watch what comes out of our mouth in the words we speak. We need to put our mind in gear before our tongue rattles off, going at a mile a minute down the road.

Whatever way we can minister or serve in, we need to be doing it harnessed with the power and mind of God, that in all of our serving, it is God, through Jesus Christ, that is getting the glory.

Peter now shifts back to the subject of the Christian doing through various sufferings (verses 12-19).

We Christians are not to think it a strange thing that we may have to suffer or go through trials and hardships, as even through fire at times. We are to rejoice, knowing that Christ also suffered. Living and doing that which is right and is the way and will of God, sometimes will bring hardships, trials, and persecutions from the world at large. Some of us suffer these things more than others. We really do not fully know how the deck of cards will be handed out to us. It is only a relatively few, like the apostle Paul, who are told in advance the hardships and sufferings they will go through as they serve the Lord and preach and teach the Gospel. Very few of us are called to be an apostle Paul. But if fiery trials do come upon us for being a Christian and doing God's will, we are to remember our Lord and Savior also went through fiery trials, so it should not be that strange to us that we may also face such trials.

We are to remember that Jesus stuck with it and was glorified with immortal life, and if we also stick with it, we shall also share in glorified immortal life.

If we are insulted or reviled (margin of NKJV) for being a Christian, we are to count it a blessing, for the Spirit of glory rests upon us. They may blaspheme God, but He is glorified through us remaining faithful to His calling and way of life.

We are certainly not to suffer as evil doers, as murderers, as a thief, as a busybody in other people's matters. There is no glory in suffering for the wrongs, sins, evils, that our human nature can possibly do. On the other hand, if we suffer for simply being a Christian, and doing God's will, we are not to be ashamed, but we should glorify God that we can suffer for Him.

We, the children of God, are being watched all the time by our Father in heaven. We are then in that sense, being judged how we are living as a Christian, as a child of God. We are expected to live and act and think differently than the rest of the un-called world. The standard is held very high, you cannot have a standard any higher than the Most High One.

Peter says the same claim Jesus made in the Gospels. When one came to Him and asked if many would be saved, Jesus said, the way was straight and narrow to eternal life, but broad was the way to destruction, and few there would be that would keep on the straight and narrow. Jesus said that many would say "Have we not done this in your name, have we not worked miracles in your name, were you not

preached in our local community?" Jesus will say to them, "I never knew you, depart from me, you that work lawlessness."

Notice the sobering words, "If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear" (NKJV).

It does not mean that sin cannot be forgiven, of course not. It is written, "God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes on Him, should not perish, but have eternal life." All can be forgiven their sins through Jesus Christ. What Peter is bringing out is the other side of the coin, the side Jesus also brought out during His ministry. Being saved means living the way and will of God, having the mind-set to OBEY God, having the mind that will be teachable, be corrected, be willing to grow in grace and knowledge. It is the willingness to STAY on the straight and narrow RIGHT TO THE END! Being a true child of God, does not mean you can now fall asleep, coast along, put up your feet and snooze away, saying, "Oh hummmm, it's all done for me, I can rest and sail along, live as I please, think as I like, speak as I want Oh hummmmm, I'll sigh oh hummmm."

No, remaining faithful to God's calling, takes some effort, it really is the straight and narrow, it really is obeying God to the end, and for Peter to get this across to his readers (and as Peter was inspired, it is really God getting it across to His children) he put it as "If the RIGHTEOUS one is SCARCELY SAVED, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?"

These words should be sobering to all Christians. Remaining faithful as a true follower of Christ takes some effort, some fortitude. Now God gives us all the power of the Holy Spirit to serve us in remaining faithful to the end. He gives us all the armor (Ephesians 6) 10-18) we need to fight the good fight, but we have our part to do, we must take the armor and make use of it. Paul said to Timothy (as we have seen going through those epistles) "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness..."

It is in that sense that the righteous one is scarcely saved.

Peter ends chapter 4 with, "Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God, commit their lives to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator."

I want you to notice a very important phrase here. It is "suffer according to the WILL of God."

Some mistakenly believe and teach that suffering for a Christian is AUTOMATIC. And if you never suffer or never have persecution, and whatever else people may think is suffering, you are not really a true Christian. That is NOT TRUE! It is according to the WILL of God. There are and have been, many a true Christian down through the ages who have gone through living a godly life, who have had VERY LITTLE, some would even say, NO suffering (sure the word "suffering" can have different meanings for different people). The apostle Paul went through many sufferings as the book of Acts brings out, but the apostle John it would seem had little "suffering" compared to Paul, and lived to a ripe old age, falling asleep in death, from what we can gather from history, of natural causes.

Suffering for the sake of Christ is for the WILL of God to decide, IF and WHEN and WHAT it will be.

1 Peter 5

Peter now talks to the elders of the Church of God, as one himself, and also one of those who were witness to the sufferings of Christ, and one who will partake in the glory to be revealed. elders are to SHEPHERD the flock of God, as an OVERSEER. A shepherd loves his sheep, he cares for them, serves and protects them, he guides them into good pasture, lets them feed by still waters. Elders are to do this work for the flock of God, not because they feel forced to, not because of the wages they may get paid, but they are to do it, because they know it is their calling from God, to guide and care for and love the Church of God.

Elders are not to be acting like little (or big) BULLIES or TYRANTS or HITLERS. They are not to be a domineering hard-nosed prize-fighter who is going to show he is the world champion in the boxing ring of the Church of God.

They are to be EXAMPLES to the flock of God. Examples of HOW a Christian should live and act and speak. And when THE CHIEF SHEPHERD appears they will receive their crown of glory that fades not away. They should not be trying in this life time to acquire some sort of crown of glory from people in the body of Christ. The praise of men they should not seek. The praise of God is all they need. In glorious eternal life they will have their crown, and all will see then, at that time, how well they did their job as an elder in the Church of God.



Jesus Christ is the Chief Shepherd and ministers assist with shepherding the flock of God which is the church.

The younger elders are to respect and submit to the older elders. Those who have served long and well in the eldership, should be respected by those who have served for much less time in the Eldership. Then on the other hand Peter says, all should be submissive one to the other. All should be clothed with HUMILITY. The key to every person's praise from God is HUMILITY. You may have all kinds of gifts, all kinds of knowledge, all sorts of power over words and oratory, all kinds of good works, great righteousness as Job had, you may spend long hours in prayer, long hours in Bible study, you may fast often, BUT if you do not have HUMILITY, it will be of no avail.

I cannot over-state this aspect of what makes a true child and true elder in the body of Christ - HUMILITY, HUMILITY. I have written an in-depth article on humility called "Humility - the precious Gem of the Christian crown." You can find it on my website.

God will RESIST the PROUD! He will fight against the proud, the vain, those who will not be humble. All elders and all children of the Lord are to be humble under the mighty hand of God, and He in due time, will exact you. We are to cast all our care on Him, not on men. We are to care for the things of God, and not worry or care about what men think. As we care for God and His way of living and working as His child or His Elder in the body of Christ, then He will care for us. He does care for us, and wants us to be the very best we can be in the Church of God, whatever our function is.

Elders (and of course all members in the Church of Christ) are to be SOBER (margin - self-controlled), VIGILANT (margin - watchful), because the adversary, the Devil, is walking about like a roaring lion, trying to destroy whoever he can. We are to RESIST him, be steadfast in the faith, knowing the same spiritual battle is being experienced by the whole brotherhood of saints everywhere in the world. We are all in the same army of the Lord waging war on the Devil, human nature and the pulls of this world in all of its varying ways.

Peter ends his first epistle with:

"May the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered for a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. To Him be the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen"

It was through Silvanus that Peter wrote, he being the scribe, testifying and exhorting that this was the true grace of God in which they all stood. The church (she) in Babylon sent greetings, as did Mark. They were to greet each other with affection - in their custom of the day, it was a kiss of love.

Peter's last words in this epistle are: "Peace to you all who are in Christ Jesus. Amen"

CHAPTER 25

THE 2ND EPISTLE OF PETER (PART 1)

Introduction

Taken from the NKJV "Personal Study Bible," Nelson Publishers, 1990,1995.

The second of two New Testament letters that bear the name of Simon Peter. The two have little in common with each other, 2 Peter being briefer and written in a different style than 1 Peter.

AUTHOR AND DATE

Some scholars have doubted that Peter was the author of 2 Peter. They usually point to differences in style, vocabulary, and theology between 1 and 2 Peter, as well as to 2 Peter's dependence on Jude. Some further maintain that Peter would never have implied that Paul's writings were equal to "the rest of the Scriptures" (3:15,16).

However, these arguments can be countered.

One cannot deny that the Greek of 1 Peter is much more polished than that of 2 Peter. But this difference could be accounted for if Peter used a different secretary to write the second epistle. Differences in vocabulary can also be explained by the differing subject matter discussed in each letter.

First Peter says that the coming of Christ is near, while 2 Peter explains why. He has not already come. This difference is explained by the differing situations of the readers. The readers of 1 Peter were facing persecution and needed to be encouraged to believe that Christ could return at any time. When the second letter was written, Peter had to explain the seeming delay of Christ's return because false teachers had been telling his readers that Christ was not going to come and, that there would be no judgment.

Second Peter 2:1-3:4 appears to quote word for word from Jude 4-19. (For a discussion of this issue see Introduction to Jude). But Paul often quotes hymns, confessions or other pieces of literature in his epistles. Why should Peter not do the same? It is possible that Peter and Jude used a common source or even that Jude copied Peter.

It is entirely appropriate for Peter to imply that Paul's writings had divine authority (see 3:15,16). The apostles wrote with the consciousness that they had this authority. Their writings were regularly read in church services along with the Old Testament Scripture.

The author of 2 Peter identifies himself as Peter in many subtle ways throughout his work. It would have taken a very skilled forger to imitate these unconscious footprints of the apostle. A number of second-century books were falsely attributed to Peter. When compared with the artificiality of these writings, the genuineness of 2 Peter becomes apparent. Peter probably wrote in the early sixties, not long before his death.

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Second Peter 3:1 seems to imply that 2 Peter was written to the same churches in Asia Minor to which 1 Peter had been written. Certain people were teaching that salvation freed Christians from the necessity of living a holy life. They twisted Paul's doctrine of salvation by grace to support their position (3:16). Since they believed it was all right to sin, they naturally mocked at the idea of Christ's return in judgment. For their own personal gain they lured people by promising them that they could be Christians and still live immoral lives.

Peter writes out of pastoral concern to counter these false teachings and their influence on the lives of early Christians. He is concerned that there be a check against this false teaching and immoral living even after he is gone (see 1:12-15).

CONTENTS

The contents of 2 Peter are fully in line with the apostle's purpose. In chapter 1 he exhorts believers to grow in the life of holiness. Chapter 2 attacks the false teachers' deceptive methods and immoral life-style. In chapter 3 Peter challenges all who deny that Christ will return to judge sin.

OUTLINE OF 2 PETER

1. Exhortation to spiritual growth 1:1-21
 - A. Introduction 1:1,2
 - B. Grow in holiness 1:3-11
 - C. Corrupt conduct judged 2:12-17
 - D. Be certain of Christ's return 1:16-21
2. Warning against false teachers. 2:1-22
 - A. The false teachers 2:1-3
 - B. God condemns falsehood 2:4-11
 - C. Corrupt conduct judged 2:12-17
 - D. Deceptive methods punished 2:18-22
 - C. Remember the truth. 1:12-15
3. Preparation for the last days 3:1-18
 - A. Be certain of the judgment 3:1-9
 - B. Be prepared for the judgment 3:10-18

2 Peter 1

Peter begins his second epistle by saying he is not only a servant (bond slave) of Jesus Christ, but also an "apostle" - one who is sent, is what the word means. He was sent to those who had obtained like PRECIOUS faith with us (probably meaning other apostles or other Christians in different parts of the Roman Empire). This precious faith came through the righteousness of God and our savior Jesus Christ.

He bids them grace multiplied through the KNOWLEDGE of God, and Jesus our Lord.

It was through the DIVINE POWER of God, who gives all things pertaining to godliness, and through the knowledge of Him who has called us to GLORY and VIRTUE.

It is indeed the power of God's Spirit that works with our mind to call us to His truths and knowledge, that we have salvation, and it surely is GLORY and VIRTUE that we are to called to partake in.

It is by all this that we are given EXCEEDINGLY GREAT AND PRECIOUS PROMISES: to partake of the DIVINE NATURE of God, having now escaped the corruption that is in the world (verses 1-4).

Partaking of the DIVINE NATURE is FAR MORE than what people ever think. As called Christians we are given the very SEED of the NATURE of God the Father. We are BEGOTTEN AGAIN! But this time begotten of God Himself. We are not just "adopted" children, we are the very LITERAL children of the Father.

What most Christian people do not realize and are not taught by their ministers, is that God the Father is REPRODUCING Himself through mankind! Reproducing to have literal children BORN into His family! We have seen the apostle Paul teach in Hebrews chapter two, that Jesus is not ashamed to call US His BROTHERS!

There is throughout the New Testament story, a Father and Son relationship mentioned over and over again. Jesus is called the FIRSTBORN from the dead, the firstborn from human to DIVINE.

This GREAT MYSTERY (now Paul says is being revealed to us) is what the angels desire to look into. They ponder it, they marvel at it, that God the Father can take physical clay, dirt, earth, and make man in His own image, then call them through the power of His Spirit, and through the ONE great sin forgiving sacrifice of Christ Jesus, and start the process, of making men and women into His VERY LIKENESS. Yes ABOVE the likeness of angels, above anything ever created by God, taking human kind and making them eventually into the God kind.

God the Father will ALWAYS be the MOST HOLY ONE, the SUPREME one. Jesus Christ will ALWAYS be our ELDER brother, next to the Father, on His right hand, but under Christ there will be millions if not billions of brothers and sisters to Jesus, all with the very DIVINE NATURE of God within them, fully perfect, fully sinless, fully never even being able to be tempted by sin any more. Oh, what GLORY indeed that shall be!!

You need to KNOW what the heavenly Father teaches on this matter in His holy word. You will find on my website an in-depth study called "A CHRISTIAN'S DESTINY." Make sure you read it, study it, meditate on it, come to see the GLORIOUS MYSTERY of the GOSPEL that is NOW revealed to us in the pages of the Bible and especially the New Testament.

Knowing this wonderful truth of complete salvation - the full end result of our salvation - we are to ADD to our faith, be diligent in adding to our faith, "virtue (excellence, resolution, Christian energy) and in exercising) virtue (develop) knowledge (intelligence), And in (exercising) knowledge (develop) self- control, and in (exercising) self-control (develop) steadfastness (patience and endurance), and in (exercising) steadfastness (develop) godliness (piety), and in (exercising) godliness (develop) brotherly affection, and in (exercising) brotherly affection (develop) Christian love" (Amplified Bible).

Is it important that a Christian adds these attributes to their basic faith? Can a saved Christian just sit back, relax, put up their feet, and go through life cat-napping their time away, until they are called home in death. Peter goes on to give us the answer:

"For as these qualities are yours and increasingly abound in you, they will keep (you) from being idle or unfruitful unto the (full personal) knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (the Messiah, the Anointed One). FOR whoever LACKS these qualities is BLIND, (spiritually) SHORTSIGHTED, seeing only what is near to him, and has

become oblivious (to the fact) that he was cleansed from his old sins. because of this brethren, be all the more solicitous and eager to make SURE (to RATIFY, to STRENGTHEN, to make STEADFAST) your calling and election; for if you DO THIS, you will NEVER STUMBLE or FALL. Thus there will be a richly and abundantly provided for you entry into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (Amplified Bible, capital words are mine).

If you are reading carefully you will see again the teaching of the New Testament, that it IS possible to FALL AWAY from Christian faith, there is no such teaching in the Bible as "once saved always saved." A Christian must STICK WITH IT, but not only stick with it, a Christian must be adding to their faith, and here Peter lists what to add.

Jesus clearly taught during His ministry that "he that shall endure to the end, the same shall be saved."

A forgiven Christian, through faith and grace, must live a different life-style than their old way of sin, doing whatever they wanted, when they wanted. They must be CONVERTED, turned upside-down, turned inside-out, be willing to be led by the Holy Spirit of God into walking the pathway of righteousness, walking down the straight and narrow road of the will, mind and attitude of God. A Christian must as Paul said, "Let this MIND be IN you, that was IN Christ Jesus (Philippians 2:5). And a Christian must live and walk this holy pathway, living by every word of God (as Jesus taught in Matthew 4:4) to the end of their life, until they sleep in death.

Peter said if we DO the things he listed we will make our calling and election SURE (verses 5-11).

Peter knew the people he was writing to, knew all that he was saying was correct, but he told them he still needed to state it again, to give emphasis once more to them of this basic foundational truth of salvation.

He also knew that his time to put off this physical tabernacle was near. He knew (from the situation and from the Holy Spirit through Christ) his death was close at hand.

He was writing this all down, so even after his death, Christians would still have this truth. He also told them that he and others like him, were not teaching cunningly deceitful fables, but they had made known the very POWER and the COMING (because He lives) of the Lord Jesus Christ, but were EYE-WITNESSES of His glorified majesty.

Yes, we have people who lived with, walked with, talked with Jesus, after He was raised from the dead. We today can have a faith that is SURE, founded upon SOLID facts. God is REAL, He DOES exist, His Son Jesus Christ DID walk this earth, did die for the sins of the world, was dead for three days and three nights, was resurrected to GLORIFIED IMMORTAL LIFE! Did ascend to heaven in the sight of some of His disciples, does live today at the Father's right hand, and will COME again to establish the Kingdom of God on earth for a 1,000 years, and will then turn it all over to the Father, when the Father and the heavenly Jerusalem comes to this earth for eternity.

Peter knew personally that Jesus did receive from God the Father HONOR and GLORY, when a voice came from heaven saying, "This IS MY BELOVED SON, in whom I am well pleased."

This voice from heaven, Peter says, he and James and John HEARD when in the holy mount (Matthew 17). That was the time that has been popularly called "The Transfiguration."

Not only that, Peter declares we have also a more sure word of prophecy. More sure because that word is STILL WITH US, in the pages of the Bible. The transfiguration is no longer seen, it was for a one time only, for Peter, James and John, to see and record for us as having seen, but PROPHECY that is for ALL TIME and all ages. The prophets wrote about end time events, and their writing are preserved still, for us to continually read, and as we read we see the day approaching. We can see the events coming to pass, taking shape, moving forward to the very end times of the last 42 months, 1260 days, the times and time and half a time, spoken about in the book of Revelation and Daniel.

We are to take heed of prophecy, as like a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star (Jesus) arises in our hearts, when we shall be raised from the dead or changed in the blink of an eye (the wonderful 1 Corinthians, chapter 15), and meet Jesus in the air, the clouds (1 Thess.4:13-18), and proceed down to the Mount of Olives (prophet Zechariah, chapter 14) to reign with Him for a thousand years (Revelation 19 and 20).

No prophecy Peter says is for PRIVATE interpretation. The prophet spoke not by the imagination of men, but spoke as they were inspired by the Holy Spirit (verses 12-21).

To understand prophecy correctly, you must let the Bible INTERPRET the Bible. Prophecy CAN be understood. The time has come for God's prophets to be understood. The Lord still has the function of "prophets" in His church (Ephesians 4:11-13). Prophecy will only be understood by those who are humble and who serve the Lord with fearful respect, who will live according to His will, who will grow in grace and knowledge, who will be corrected, who will love the Lord God with all their heart, mind and life.

On my website and as we later get into the Book of Revelation you will find the answers to Bible prophecy. You will know what to watch for in world events, and you will know when it is near for the Lord Jesus to return.

CHAPTER 26

THE 2ND EPISTLE OF PETER (PART 2)

2 Peter 2

For many Christians today it is "just have love" and we'll all get to heaven, you, your way and me, my way. They might go on to say, "It really does not matter about 'doctrine' - about what is this truth or that truth, as long as we can all get along and have love for everyone, that what will get us to heaven."

Now, of course Christianity is showing kindness and love towards all people. It is a religion of giving and serving others. I do not know of a Christian "sect" that does not teach helping and being nice and kind, doing good deeds, and indeed showing love. But ... nevertheless, when you read the New Testament, all of it, then it becomes clear that certain truths of God's word ARE IMPORTANT, doctrine, or what you might call "theology" DOES MATTER at times. Jesus warned in Matthew 24 that MANY would come in His name, saying that Jesus was the Christ, would teach "Christian dogma" BUT DECEIVE MANY!

Now, I somehow do not get the message from Jesus or the apostles, that we are to think "deception" is to do with "loving people" or "being nice and kind to people." There are lots of kind and nice and loving people in the Islamic religion, maybe you have a neighbor like that. I mean even agnostics and atheists can be "nice" - "loving" - "serving" - people.

The bottom line is that what Jesus was meaning was that MANY would come teaching Him and Christianity, but would deceive people in all kinds of wrong and incorrect "theology" of God the Father and Jesus the Christ. Some of those people might be deceived themselves, but as they say "You might be sincere, but you can still be sincerely wrong." Then on the other hand, there would come many who are NOT deceived, they know better, but for money, fame, the praise of men, to get a following, and for other not so sincere attitudes of the mind, go on teaching people ERROR, and so do indeed deceive MANY about what is from God and Christ.

We have seen in some of the letters of the apostle Paul, that he at times did not pull any punches, when talking about such deceptive teachers and preachers, that had come within the Church of God.

And now, in this letter of Peter's to his readers, we come to a chapter that is plain and simple. Peter is going to tell it like it is, a "I'll put it right into your face, and tell you what I think of these false teachers that will be right within Christianity, right there among the true people of God."

Right off the bat, Peter says that there was always false prophets among those who were under the banner of God, and so there will be false teachers, now, among those who are under the name of Christ - Christian. And notice, in this first verse of chapter two, those false teachers will bring in, introduce, heretical DOCTRINES! They will teach "theology" if you will, not as it is in God's word, but FALSE ideas and false doctrines. Hence they will as Jesus said, DECEIVE MANY!

It will be so serious a matter, that Peter says they will DENY the very one who died for them. How do you deny Jesus? Well yes, you can deny Him, by wrong actions, words, and deeds, towards other people - a hating your fellow man, but as I've said, I know of no Christian sect that out and outright teaches you to "hate" others and do them mental, emotional, and physical harm. Now there have been and maybe still is, those Christian sects that teach immorality is moral, and "evil is good and good is evil" theology. But they are not the run of the mill "Christianity" - they are the smaller "sects" and "cults."

Jesus said that the many who would come in His name and deceive many, would be so large and so popular, in the main stream of Christianity, that IF it was possible, even the VERY ELECT would be deceived! Yes, Jesus said, that, you can see it in Matthew 24. Again I do not think Jesus was talking about some Christian sect teaching you can and should kill people or have many wives, or smoke pot, or get high on sniffing glue.

The truth of the matter is that Jesus, and other writers of the New Testament, when talking about "false" teachers, were talking about their overall "theology" and that that false theology would be deceiving the majority of people under the name of "Christ" or "Christian." It would only be the very elect at the time of the close of the age, that would not be deceived. In another place Jesus said about His true followers: "Fear not little flock," and the Greek means VERY LITTLE flock, "it is my Father's pleasure to give you the Kingdom."

This does not sound like to me that Jesus was talking about and to, the ONE and A HALF BILLION people on earth today who put themselves under the name of "Christian."

Well, it is time to see what Peter was inspired to write about these false teachers. I will use the AMPLIFIED Bible:

THE APOSTLE PETER: "But also (in those days) there arose false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among yourselves, who will subtly and stealthily introduce heretical doctrines (destructive heresies) ... And MANY will follow their immoral ways and lascivious doings; because of them the TRUE WAY will be maligned and defamed" (verses 1-2).

COMMENT: The faith once delivered to the saints was ALREADY in Peter's time, becoming corrupted. To his readers he said false teachers would come among THEM! Just how much more corrupt would it become 500 years from Peter's day, or a 1,000 years? How about thinking 2,000 years after Peter.

Do you really think that today's popular "Christianity" is purer today than what Peter was here writing about? No my friends, it just does work that way, that is human nature does not work that way. As I've shown you, Jesus said that before His return, deception would be so great that IF it was possible even the elect would be deceived!

THE APOSTLE PETER: "And in their covetousness (lust, greed) they will exploit you with false (cunning) arguments.

COMMENT: Many of these false teachers LIVE OFF the people who send them money. And many of them live a pretty good physical life style. They get so they cannot give it up, it becomes an obsession with them. Notice their "theological" teachings or arguments are CUNNING. It is all packaged up in spiritual sounding words, and it is what the people who follow them WANT to hear. The apostle Paul warned about that in his letter to Timothy (see 2 Timothy 4:1-4), and told him that people would turn AWAY their ears from the TRUTH, and would be turned to FABLES! If you are reading your Bible from cover to cover with DILIGENCE, and if you are studying and searching the Scriptures and reading some of the Bible Studies on my website, you will come to know the MANY FABLES out there in the majority Christianity of our time.

THE APOSTLE PETER: "From of old the sentence (of condemnation) for them has not been idle; their destruction (eternal misery) has not been asleep. For God did not even spare angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, delivered them to be kept there in pits of gloom till the judgment and their doom" (verses 2-4).

COMMENT: The KJV here has the better overall translation: "...spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment." The Greek for "hell" here is "tartaroo" and means place of restraint. There were angels that sinned, they followed Lucifer in rebellion. The truth of that is contained in various studies on my website. After their rebellion they were cast back to earth. Jesus once said He saw Satan as lightning falling from heaven to earth. Those angels now became demons, and they were cursed with chains of darkness, all that is now in them is darkness. They are in restraint.

God only allows them to have freedom to do their evil work to a LIMIT. Certain things they cannot do, God put a leash on them, they can only go so far. And they have not yet met their final judgment. Do you remember some demons said to Jesus, "Have you come to torment us before the time?" When sin and death is finally "put away" - when neither will exist, just imagine the horror Satan and the demons will experience. With their blackened minds they will have not one single person to darken and deceive. And who knows what else God the Father will put on them as their eternal judgment.

It is coming, God is not sleeping. What may seem a long time to us (two thousand years from Jesus' first coming and we still wait that judgment) is but a blink of the eye to God.

THE APOSTLE PETER: "And He spared not the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven other persons, when He brought a flood upon the world of ungodly (people). (Gen.6-8; 1 Peter 3:20). And He condemned to ruin and extinction the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, reducing them to ashes (and thus) set them forth as an example to those who would be ungodly; (Gen. 19:24). And He rescued righteous Lot, greatly worn out and distressed by the wanton ways of the ungodly and lawless - (Gen. 19:16,29). For that just man, living (there) among them, tortured his righteous soul every day with what he saw and heard of (their) unlawful and wicked deeds - Now if (all these things are true, then be sure) the Lord knows how to rescue the godly out of temptations and trials, and how to keep the ungodly under chastisement until the day of judgment and doom. And particularly those who walk after the flesh and indulge in the lust of polluting passion and scorn

and despise authority. Presumptuous (and) daring (self-willed and self-loving creatures)! They scoff at and revile dignitaries (glorious ones) without trembling (verses 5-10).

COMMENT: Mighty strong words and very chilling. Being a false teacher of God's word is no small matter. It is a serious matter indeed to set yourself to represent and expound the word of God to others. That is why James said, "Brethren, do not let many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive the greater judgment" (James 3:1). The examples of the wicked, the persons in the wrong, during Noah's day and Lot's day, shows God will eventually hand out punishment. The false teachers, may not openly scoff and revile the glorious ones of God and Christ and the righteous angels, but in not teaching the truths of the word of the Lord, and even, in whatever mild or hard manner they scoff at those who do teach those truths, they have in effect scoffed and reviled God the Father and Christ and the holy angels - the glorious ones.

THE APOSTLE PETER: "Whereas (even) angels, though superior in might and power, do not bring a defaming charge against them before the Lord" (verse 11).

COMMENT: The angels leave it all in God's hands. They know when to speak and when not to speak, and what to speak about, BUT ...

THE APOSTLE PETER: "But these (people)! Like unreasoning beasts, mere creatures of instinct, born (only) to be captured and destroyed, RAILING AT THINGS OF WHICH THEY ARE IGNORANT, they shall utterly perish in their (own) CORRUPTION (in their destroying they shall surely be destroyed),

COMMENT: It's like saying, "These fellows just do not know what they are talking about." But sadly MANY of them KNOW BETTER, yet they will not REPENT! They want the pay-check, they want the praise of people, the crowds that follow them, and if they will not repent of teaching false doctrines they will face destruction.

THE APOSTLE PETER: "Being destined to receive (punishment as) the reward of (their) UNRIGHTEOUSNESS (suffering wrong as the hire for their wrongdoing). They count it a delight to revel in the day time (living luxuriously and delicately). They are blots and blemishes, REVELLING in their DECEPTIONS and carousing together (even) as they feast with you" (verse 12-13).

COMMENT: Righteousness is defined by the Almighty as "His commandments" - see Psalm 119:172. Many of these false teachers do live a physically luxurious life style, many of them have physical wealth above the average person, and because they have so many that follow them, they think they deserve all the physical riches they have.

It's an attitude of saying something like: "Well I've brought all these people to God and Christ through my teaching and preaching, I deserve to live in physical splendor. They are reveling in their deceptions, a kind of "laughing all the way to the bank" we might say. They gather together at "Theological seminars" for a week-end or maybe a whole week, and live feasting, even among the very people of God at times. This was already GOING ON in Peter's day! How much MORE is it going on in the world today, nearly 2,000 years after Peter wrote this?

THE APOSTLE PETER: "They have eyes full of harlotry, insatiable for sin. They beguile and bait and lure away unstable souls. Their hearts are trained in covetousness (lust, greed), (they are) children of a curse (exposed to cunning)! FORSAKING the STRAIGHT road they have gone astray; they have followed the way of Balaam (the son) of Beor, who loved the reward of wickedness. (Num. 22:5,7). (verse 14-15).



The way of Balaam is greed - the reward of wickedness

His words really do speak VERY PLAINLY and right in your face. These teachers are just simply not on the RIGHT ROAD - they are off in left field.

They may have degrees from any number of "Theological schools" - they may be dynamic speakers and preachers, but the fact is they are ON THE WRONG ROAD - they are as Jesus once said about religious leaders of His day, "Blind leaders of the blind, and both will fall into the ditch."

It is your individual duty to follow the example of the Bereans in Acts 17. They SEARCHED THE SCRIPTURES DAILY, to see if what Paul was preaching was according to the Scriptures.

These false teachers, will they get away with it all, well some for a time may, but the day will come whenlike Balaam...

THE APOSTLE PETER: "But he was REBUKED for his own transgression when a dumb beast of burden spoke with human voice and checked the prophets madness. (Num.22:21-31). (verse 16).

COMMENT: Do you see the depth of it? Peter puts the theology of false teachers in the same category as "MADNESS." To put it in other terms, false teachers are INSANE!!

You've had enough plain talk you may say, well Peter is not yet finished! He is going to tell us that some of the false teachers KNEW THE TRUTH at one time, BUT TURNED AWAY FROM IT!!

THE APOSTLE PETER: "These are springs without water and mists driven along before a tempest, for whom is reserved forever the gloom of darkness. For utterly loud boasts of folly, they beguile and lure with lustful desires of the flesh those who are barely escaping from them who are wrongdoers. They promise them LIBERTY, when they themselves are the slaves of depravity and defilement - for by whatsoever

anyone is made inferior or worse or is overcome, to that (person or thing) he is enslaved. For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through (the full, personal) knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they AGAIN become ENTANGLED in them and are overcome, their LAST CONDITION is worse (for them) than the first for never to have obtained a (full, personal) knowledge of the way of righteousness would have been better for them than, having obtained (such knowledge), to TURN BACK from the HOLY COMMANDMENT which was (verbally) delivered to them" (verses 17-21).

COMMENT: A lot of the false teachers are indeed BOASTFUL and VAIN and POMPOUS. Maybe you have known such teachers of the Christian religion. They believe they have some "special connection" with God, that all others do not have. They are often deceived by their OWN mind. They also often promise people many desires of the flesh, like being physically rich, healed from physical ailments, success in the work-a-day world, a better reward in the after-life, and even protection from all the plagues and wars to come on earth before Jesus returns, in some "place of safety." Does this all sound familiar to some of you?

These false prophets and teachers promise LIBERTY - from all kinds of things that people are caught in that trouble them, of course they promise them liberty from having to OBEY God, or live by His every word, or keep His commandments. One BIG liberty they teach is that the 4th commandment can be ignored. If you are wondering what THAT one is, then read Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5.

The fact is, the bottom line is, these teachers are themselves caught in spiritual depravity, delusion, and sin. If you are in the life habit of breaking any of God's commandments, then you are slaves to sin and law-breaking - you are defiled. Look at God's TEN commandments. Is there any one of them you or these false teachers are breaking as a way of life? If there is, Peter is speaking directly to you and to them here in these verses.

I have known MANY in the last 40 years whom I thought had a personal relationship with Christ, they really did know the basic foundational doctrines of God, they seemed to be "spiritual" but when an "organization" and "men" failed them, they were willing to walk away from Christ and the Bible. They WENT BACK into the world from which they came. Some of these people were very close friends with me, and it is a shock to see such people described in this manner in this passage of Peter's letter. It is more disturbing still as we look at the final verse of this chapter.

THE APOSTLE PETER: "There has befallen them the thing spoken of in the true proverb, The dog turns back to his own vomit, and, The sow is washed only to wallow again in the mire. (Prov.26:11).

COMMENT: In whatever ways it may be, God only knows, it would have been better for these people to have NEVER KNOWN the way of righteousness and salvation, the way into the Kingdom of God at Jesus' return, into the first resurrection. They could at least have been classified as BLINDED, never being called in this life time, and be in the same boat as the millions, nay, BILLIONS that will have salvation offered to them in the WHITE THRONE JUDGMENT or SECOND resurrection talked about in Revelation 20.

I can only hope and pray that all those people I have known that have gone back into the world will one day REPENT AGAIN, before Jesus comes back to earth. Then again Hebrews 10:26-31 is there. I know God is merciful and very patient, I'm sure He can have mercy upon them IF they will turn to Him again.

This chapter in Peter's second epistle, together with Jesus' rebuking of religious leaders in Matthew 23 and that of Jude in his letter, are the THREE most detailed and long chastisements of false teachers in the entire New Testament. They are most sobering chapters to read. At times God has no choice but to CRY ALOUD AND TELL IT AS IT IS!

CHAPTER 27

THE 2ND EPISTLE OF PETER (PART 3)

2 Peter 3

Peter was writing this epistle in part to stir up their remembrance. He wanted them to be mindful of the prophets of old and the commandments of the apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Peter was inspired to tell them that in the LAST DAYS, scoffers would come, who would want to just follow their own lustful ways, certainly not want to live by the words of the Bible, as Jesus taught we should (Matt. 4:4). They would scoff at the teaching of the second visible body return of Jesus to this earth. They would look at past history and say all is going along as ever before on the planet, people living and dying, people at war with each other, famine, earthquakes, deceases of all kinds ... just the wheel turning as ever before right from the beginning of life on earth.

Peter says these people are WILLINGLY IGNORANT, they have their head in the sand so to speak. They will not simply look around and see the wonders of creation demand it all has a creator. They want to be ignorant about Genesis chapter one, the earth standing in water, then in and out of water, as God directed in that beginning chapter of His Bible. Even with all the evidence of modern science, the earth was at one time not covered with water and then at some time in history it was covered with water. There was a world at one time containing all the "dinosaur" creatures, and then they all of a sudden disappeared. Modern science admits this was so, but these scoffers just do not want to see a being called "God" in any of this.

The earth today is kept in its function for us human beings to inhabit, we have laws that science must admit are there, like gravity, but the scoffers will still scoff at anything having to do with an Almighty Being that made it all, and keeps it all in place to enact His plan for mankind and the physical earth. This planet will keep revolving and keep being inhabitable unto the day of the Lord that will bring a universal fire in final judgment, that will burn up all ungodly person and usher in a new heaven and a new earth, as the last chapters of the book of Revelation expound.

Peter wanted his readers not to be ignorant of how the time plan of all this, is working out. God is VERY PATIENT, His time is not our time, a DAY to the Lord can be as a THOUSAND years in human time, and a THOUSAND YEARS as a DAY to God. The Almighty One is NOT on OUR time table. To us a thousand years is a long time, to God it is but a day, and if the Lord wants to make a short time to our thinking, into a long time, He can do so (verses 1-8).

Verse 8 has in times past been used to try and prove God is working on a 7,000 years plan. That idea is not new, some, many centuries go proclaimed this teaching. Bishop Usher tried to prove that the creation in Genesis one, was in 4004 B.C. If that could be proved to be correct (which by the way cannot be proved), then we are OVER the 6,000 years of man, and the 7th one thousand years should have already come to earth, and Jesus should already have returned.

The words of verse 8, DO NOT prove such a 7,000 years plan is what God is working on. All that verse teaches is that GOD'S TIME OF DOING THINGS IS NOT OUR TIME!³

The Eternal can shorten or lengthen the events of what He plans to work out on this earth with human beings. Jesus gave parables that tell us the same thing. If you read them carefully some people will be surprised at the coming of Christ when He does come, and others will be sleeping, thinking it is far away. Yes, certain prophetic events must come to pass (if the nations of the world do not repent, and there is no evidence they ever will on their own steam) before Jesus returns to earth, but you see God the Father, can if He wills, make certain events lengthen out before the next event of prophecy is to manifest itself.

Then will all that said, it still remains that God is NOT SLACK, concerning His promises, as men count slackness, because men look through human eyes, and forget about verse 8 that we have just read ... time with God is not our time. God is PATIENT, and that patience or LONGSUFFERING is often way too long for many of us humans.

How many have lived in this past 20th century hoping to see the end of this age and the return of Jesus? Many thousands I'm sure. How many in my generation (I'm recently, in 2007, aged 65; in September I reached what some call the golden age - well I do get a few dollars here and there for being classified now as a "senior") want to live and see Jesus return in power and glory. If my generation lives for another 20 to 40 years, maybe it will happen. But there is NO GUARANTEE that will be the case. When I think of the last 40 years, it's hard to imagine where they all went - went by quickly indeed, and the older I get the quicker the years seem to go by.

Now here's ONE BIG reason why God is L O N G S U F F E R I N G to give His children a longer time to work in spreading the Gospel so more will come to repentance and to a saving faith. God can give some extra time, if it's His desire, He is after all the Almighty, and all things are in His hands. He can shorten the days or lengthen the days as He wills.

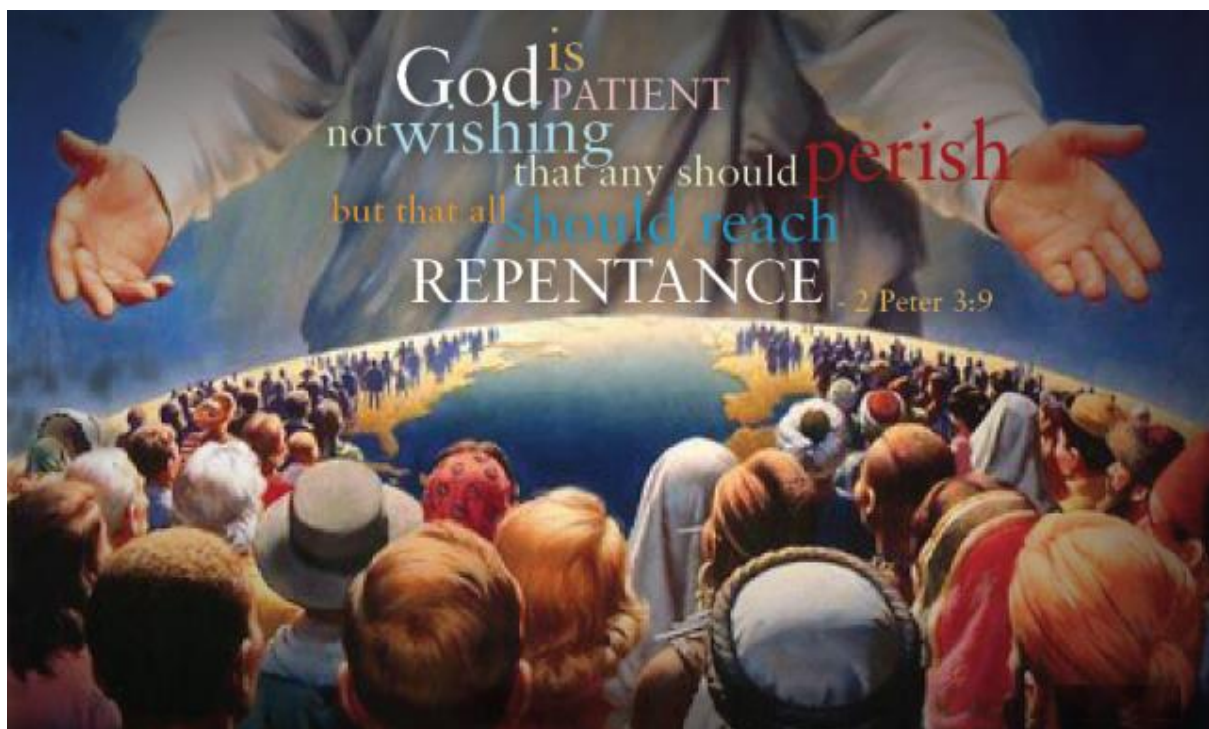
We do not tell God what to do and when to do it. It is HE that will decide when all that is written in the prophets is to take place, and it will be He who has the final word for the "go ahead" for Jesus to leave heaven and to return again to earth.

³ **EDITOR'S NOTE:** I would agree with this assessment of 2 Peter 3:8. The Church of God teaching that God has a 7 000 year plan with 6 millennial days (6 000 years) given to man to go his own way before Jesus Christ returns and begins the millennium (1 000 years) symbolised by the Sabbath gets its best support from Hebrews 4.

The more commonly accepted chronology of Edwin Thiele for the kings of Israel leads to a date for Adam's creation around the year 3960 BC (My own research leads me to adjust this by 2 years to 3958 BC). Around 2040 AD will see mankind's history reach 6 000 years though there is the possibility that God may cut this time short (Matthew 24:21-22) when He sends His son to prevent mankind destroying himself.

God is LOVE. He does not want to see ANY person PERISH. He wishes that ALL would come to REPENTANCE, He would like that, but it does not mean ALL WILL repent. Desiring all to repent is not the same as all people being willing to repent. Mankind was created with FREE agency, God cannot and will not FORCE people to repent, they must make that choice. God sets before mankind GOOD and EVIL, He wants them to choose the good, but each individual of mankind must decide for themselves which way they will choose (see Duet.30:19). And each individual must remain FAITHFUL in that choice TO THE END (see Ezekiel 18:21-32). (verse 9).

Peter reminds us in verses 10-13 that the DAY OF THE LORD, will come on the earth like a thief in the night - UNEXPECTEDLY - most on earth will not be in the frame of mind to expect the Day of God to come. Paul gave us a little more about the attitude of mind that most will have at that time. He said that indeed the Day of the Lord comes as a thief in the night. The world will at that time be saying "Peace and safety" then SUDDEN destruction will come! (see 1 Thes. 5:1-6).



The "Day of the Lord" is spoken about in many passages of the Bible - Old and New Testaments. In the book of Revelation it is called "...the GREAT DAY of His wrath..." (Rev.6:17). Before that time period there is to come the GREAT TRIBULATION. In Revelation 6 that is the 5th seal - the killing of many of the saints of God. Jesus spoke about THE tribulation in Matt. 24:21 - a tribulation like no other in the entire history of mankind. Luke records Jesus' words on this in Luke 21:20-24. It will be the time when all that is written shall come to pass, and those in Jerusalem better flee to the hills, for it will be a time of anguish for the Jewish people once more.

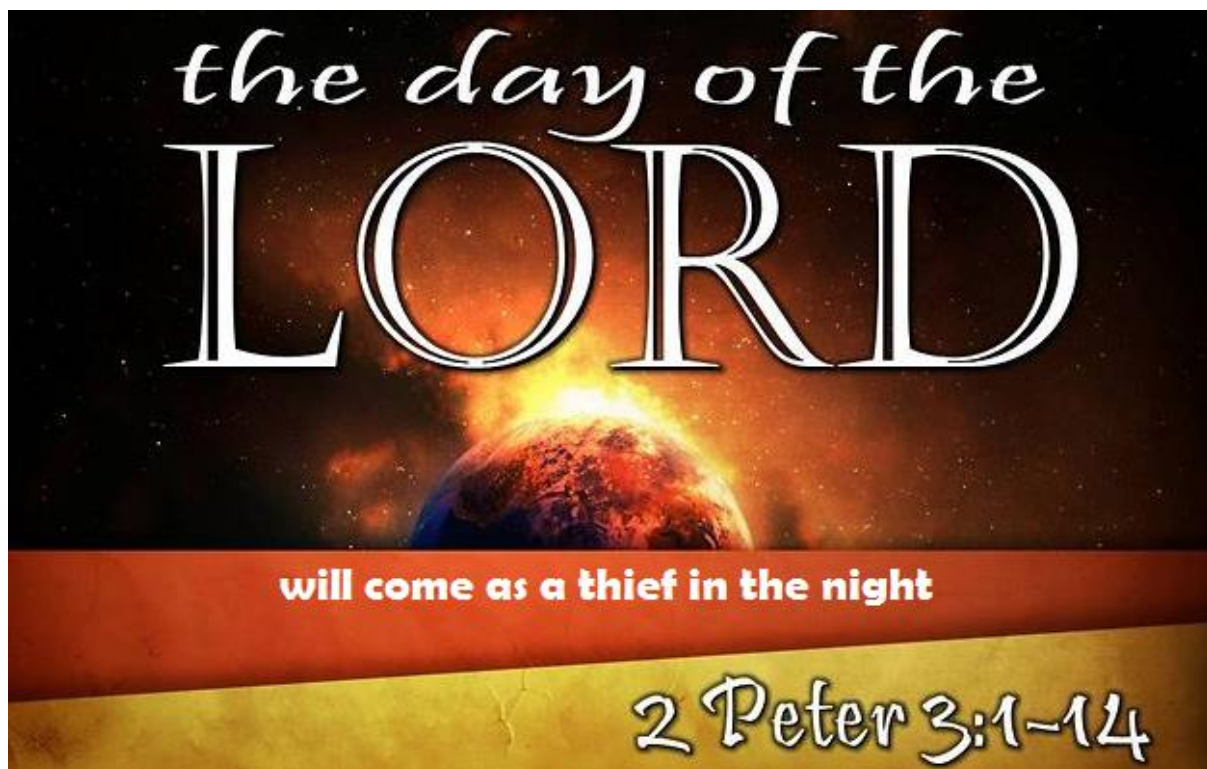
Jeremiah informs us that it is "Jacob's trouble" (Jer. 30:7). Now Jacob had 12 SONS - Judah (the Jews) being only ONE of the twelve. The other sons finally ended up travelling into Europe and have become most of the nations of Western Europe, the British commonwealth and the United States of America.

In a nut shell then: The coming BEAST power of Revelation, now rising in Europe, will conquer and control the WESTERN world, it will have its particular strange "Christianity" - its Babylon Mystery religion (which it already has) - all will have to worship this "beast" and its form of Christianity, which is as far as the east is from the west, in relation to God's true religion of the Bible.

The Lord's people and probably many in the now fundamental Protestant denominations (who will see the true correct religion of God, through the teaching and example of the true Church of God) will not bow down to worship this Beast power or its form of religion. Many will then be killed for holding to the faith once delivered to the saints.

After this has taken place, the Beast power will DECLARE PEACE, those willing to worship the Beast system will, for a short time, indeed HAVE PEACE, that is what Paul was referring to in 1 Thes.5. THEN will come the DAY OF THE LORD, or the Great Day of His Wrath (Rev.6:17). Most on earth will not expect it. As a thief in the night it will come on the earth.

There will be HEAVENLY SIGNS (Jesus also and Joel the prophet spoke about that - Mat.24:29; Joel 2:30-31). Peter puts this way: "heavens pass away with great noise, the elements melt with fervent heat, the earth burnt up....the heavens on fire ... and elements shall melt with fervent heat."



All that is then to take place is recorded in the book of Revelation from chapter 7 to 20. Certainly nothing in mankind's history will be like the events of the DAY OF THE LORD!

I have covered in much detail the prophecy of these end time events in MANY studies on my website.

But after and beyond all of that GREAT Tribulation and the Day of the Lord, there is promised a new heaven and new earth, a NEW AGE to COME, as the apostle Paul once termed it. All will not be lost, the earth and some of mankind, will remain. Peter is using a "general" statement in this passage of verses 10-13.

Many other passages in other prophetic books of the Bible, show not all is lost or destroyed. Jesus did say (Matt.24 again) that if the days were not shortened then all flesh would be obliterated from planet earth, but the days will be shortened. Jesus will come and usher in a new age, a new heaven and a new earth during the 1,000 year period mentioned in Revelation 20, and as told by the holy prophets of old in many passages such as Isaiah 11 and Zechariah 14.

Peter is NOT here in these verses talking about the passages of Revelation 21 and 22. A new heaven and a new earth that will come at the END of the 1,000 year period. Many have thought Peter was referring to those passages of Revelation. There may be a DUAL aspect of what Peter is stating here, but the main thought is the prophetic DAY OF THE LORD, as in many other passages of the Bible.

Peter's context has been that many would scoff in the last days concerning the teaching that Jesus Christ is to return to earth again. He is telling his readers that God is patient, God is not slack concerning that prophetic event of Christ coming back to set up the Kingdom of God on earth. Then he proceeds to relate how the Day of the Lord will come (as a thief - surprising most) and the heavenly signs to announce it, then the restoration - a new age, a new heaven and a new earth under Christ who has indeed come as promised.

If the you have not yet studied my in-depth study called "Armageddon and the New Age" then I encourage you to do so. There is so much that has been promised from God concerning the age to come, the Kingdom of God on earth, that my study of it, is only the tip of the iceberg. You can continue the study by reading all the prophetic books of the Bible, and noting especially the context where the phrase "day of the Lord" is used.

As we look for all these things to come to pass, as we know those promises are sure, then we are to be DILIGENT, having peace, without spot, and blameless. We can only do all of that, by being in a humble repentant attitude of mind, continually wanting to serve God, obeying Him, living His WAY of life, living by His every word, and just love Him with all our heart, mind, and life (verse 14). John the Baptist's parents were counted as "blameless" before God. Not because they were sinless, only ONE has ever been sinless (Jesus Christ) - they were counted as blameless because they did what I've just stated above and because they had a humble repentant attitude of mind.

Peter again states that the LONGSUFFERING of the Lord is SALVATION. So if all things promised do not come to pass in our life time, if Jesus does not return before we physically fall asleep in death, then we need to remember that it may be that the Lord is continuing to be longsuffering with the people on earth, that MANY more might find salvation and be a part of the FIRST resurrection.

Peter mentions Paul taught the very same thing ... God is longsuffering! He also points out to us that some of Paul's writings are quite deep "theologically speaking" and may be hard to understand at first. They who are unlearned and unstable (not

meaning a little mental, or psycho) but unlearned and unstable in getting to know how to study the Scriptures, in a way that puts them all together to obtain the results of the truth of the matter on any particular Bible subject.

Such persons end up TWISTING the Scriptures, come to the WRONG understanding of things written in the Bible, and it all leads in the end to their destruction, and if when God gives them the light to see and obtain the truth, they still will not accept it, then it will mean, sadly, their final destruction in the second death, as told us in Revelation 20.

I want you to notice what Peter is saying in context about the writings of Paul, the epistles of Paul, these unlearned people wrest Paul's writings as they do OTHER SCRIPTURES (verse 16)!!

By the time Peter was writing this epistle, all true Christians and ministers, HAD COME TO SEE THAT THE WRITINGS OF PAUL WERE NOT JUST HIS IDEAS, HIS "THEOLOGY," BUT WERE ACCEPTED AS **SCRIPTURE** - the New Testament was being INSPIRED to be written, and the apostles KNEW what letters were INSPIRED.

The New Testament was BEING FORMED during the FIRST century A.D. The idea that it was the Roman Catholic church that formulated the canon of New Testament Scripture in the 2nd to 4th century, is totally blown to shreds by this verse here in the second epistle of Peter.

An old book (1984) but a book I recommend you read is "The Original Bible Restored" by Ernest Martin. Maybe your local Library will have it, or Internet websites like Amazon.com or Barnes and Noble.com carry it somewhere on their file selling bookstores. Maybe one day I may upload the entire book to my website. It speaks of how the New Testament was canonised by the apostles being completed with apostle John and the Book of Revelation.

Peter gives us all a warning in verse 17. We may know these things he has written about, we may know them very well, maybe we've studied them for years, but that does not mean we cannot FALL AWAY from righteousness back into the error of the wicked, or be LED ASTRAY by the errors of the wicked, or those "unlearned" in the Scriptures. We are to be on guard all the time that we do NOT FALL from our STEADFASTNESS! Paul also taught the same, and so did Jesus, for He said, "Those that endure to the END shall be saved."

One way to make sure you endure in steadfastness is to GROW IN GRACE AND KNOWLEDGE of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ...." (verse 18).

You need to love to love the truth of the matter. You need to hunger and thirst after righteousness. You need to study the Scriptures, read the Bible from cover to cover. You need to meditate upon God's word, and PRAY to the Lord for guidance. Pray to the Lord that you will not be one of the "unlearned" in the Scriptures, and be led away by the errors of the wicked.

And so we have done the full circle again, which brings us back to making sure you GROW in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be GLORY both NOW and FOREVER. Amen!

CHAPTER 28

THE 1ST EPISTLE OF JOHN (PART 1)

Introduction

This introduction is taken from the NKJV Personal Study Edition, Thomas Nelson, 1990, 1995.

First John is a favorite among the General Epistles of the New Testament.... It is called a "general" epistle because those to whom it was addressed are not named.

AUTHOR AND DATE

Although the writer does not mention his own name, this epistle, like the Gospel of John, was written by the apostle John, son of Zebedee. Its readers were familiar with John's message, testimony, and style.

John lived until about A.D.100. He thus survived the other apostles and was viewed as the one remaining authentic voice of our Lord. When doubts had arisen about the facts and interpretation of Jesus' life and message, John wrote his Gospel to anchor the faith of the believers. He then wrote this epistle to establish the certainty of a personal experience of eternal life in Jesus Christ. Irenaeus, a second-century church father, quoted John's disciple, Polycarp, to confirm John's authorship of this letter.

The content of the epistle and the historical setting seem to indicate a date between A.D.85 and 95. It had to be late in John's ministry but most likely before he was exiled to Patmos where he wrote the Book of the Revelation.

BACKGROUND

This letter was probably sent to a group of Christians living in Asia Minor who were troubled by false teachers. Although these teachers had left the church, they were trying to persuade Christians to follow their false teaching. These teachers denied that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, because they did not believe that God had really become a human being. They seem to have claimed a higher revelation through which they knew God directly. While claiming not to have sin, they paid no attention to Christ's commandments, particularly His command to love one another.

PURPOSE

John's purpose is clearly stated in 5:13: "That you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God." John writes to show that no true knowledge of God is possible without commitment to the divine-human Son of God and without receiving the forgiveness for sin that His death provides. Fellowship with God will be evidenced by faith in Christ, obedience to His commands, and love for the brethren.

CONTENTS

This letter emphasizes that God the Son truly became a man in Jesus Christ. Through this divine-human Christ eternal life is offered to humanity. His death has provided forgiveness for our sins. His love expressed in dying for us is both the pattern of, and power for, our lives. We receive this forgiveness, love, and eternal life through trusting in Him as the Son of God who became man. Thus we abide in Him and in the Father. Our faith in Him rests on the witness of the apostles and on the witness of the Holy Spirit in Scripture and in our hearts.

The Holy Spirit empowers us for love and holy living. Because Christ has shown us that God is light or holiness, we cannot live in Him and practice sin. The marks of the true Christian are obedience, love, and continued faith in Christ.

OUTLINE OF 1 JOHN

(I). God revealed in Christ.(1:1-4)

(II). Walking in the light.(1:5-2:2)

A. God is light.(1:5)

B. Christians walk in light.(1:6-10)

C. Forgiveness is available.(2:1,2)

(III). Evidences of salvation.(2:3-29)

A. Obedience to Christ's commands.(2:3-6)

B. Love for one another.(2:7-11)

C. Love for God.(2:12-17)

D. Loyalty to Christ.(2:18-25)

E. Guidance by the Spirit.(2:26,27)

F. Confidence at Christ's appearing.(2:28,29)

(IV). Characteristics of God's children.(3:1-24)

A. Likeness to God.(3:1-3)

B. Freedom from sin.(3:4-9)

C. Love for the brethren.(3:10-17)

D. Assurance of salvation.(3:18-24)

1. Confirmed by obedience.(3:18-22)

2. Witnessed by the Holy spirit.(3:23,24)

(V). Discernment and love.(4:1-21)

A. Tests for false teaching.(4:1-6)

1. Belief in the Son.(4:1-3)

2. Obedience to the gospel.(4:4-6)

B. Love for fellow Christians.(4:7-21)

1. The command to love.(4:7-12)

2. The power to love: abiding in Christ.(4:13-16)

3. The results of love.(4:17-21)

(VI). Faith in the Son of God.(5:1-17)

A. The source of spiritual birth.(5:1-5)

B. The ground of assurance.(5:6-17)

1. Witnessed to by God.(5:6-12)

2. Written by John.(5:13)

3. Tested in prayer.(5:14-17)

(VII). A summary of Christian certainties.(5:18-21)

1 John 1

John starts by nailing home that Jesus Christ was not a figment of a religious sect of Judaism. He gives witness that Jesus was seen and heard and touched by the very apostles of the first century, and He, Jesus was the very WORD of life, and in HIM is

eternal life, and it is true that Jesus was WITH the Father and then DID come as a human person, to manifest the very essence of God.

John says he and others like him, have and are declaring Jesus as Messiah, and in so doing all may have fellowship together, and even more important is that we can have fellowship with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ.

You will note that there is not one word about another personal being of the Holy Spirit. Why not if the Holy Spirit is indeed a personal being separate from the Father and Son. The simple and easy answer is that John did not mention a third person to fellowship with, because the Holy Spirit is NOT a third personal being. The Holy Spirit is the very NATURE and POWER that emanates from both the Father and the Son. The truth about the Holy Spirit is in other studies on my website.

John writes so his readers can have joy that is full and running over (verses 1-4).

John then quickly goes into the subject of LIGHT and DARKNESS. He says God is LIGHT, and in Him there is NO darkness at all. John is getting right at the trunk of the tree. By close to the end of the first century A.D. there was already a movement within the Christian Church of God, to DEPART from the true light that was in Christ Jesus, a departing was under way from the true teachings and doctrines of God, a departing from the COMMANDMENTS of God, as John makes very plain in other verses and chapters of this epistle.

John continues his bulls-eye talk. He shoots right from the hip, fast and square. If we try to say we have fellowship with God and yet walk, live, practice our life living in darkness, we are simply fooling ourselves and LYING to others as well as ourselves. We are just NOT in the truth, period!

If on the other hand, we walk, live our lives, in the LIGHT, just as God is in the light, then we can have fellowship with each other, and as we are in the right humble and obedient mind-set, then the mercy of God can be extended towards us, we can be forgiven our sins through the blood of Christ Jesus (verses 5-7).

And that is indeed the key factor to having our sins forgiven. It is being in an attitude of repentance - humble - and having an outlook on Christian living that desires to live by God's commandments. John throughout this epistle hits this true godly mind-set time after time. My in-depth studies on being saved by grace, and repentance, show the key importance of having this attitude of mind.

Now, as John moves on in regards to the question of sin, it becomes obvious that when he was writing, there was already a false teaching being spread by some, that as children of God we are sinless, or put another way, we DO NOT sin anymore, a kind of grace in advance, which then leads to, do whatever you want, because you are already forgiven. A very strange and destructive teaching because it leads to the complete opposite mind-set you need to have to be under the grace of God.

John asserts that if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. Once you come to see the holiness of the Lord, and the perfectness and holiness of His commandments, it is mind-blowing to think that some could actually believe they do not sin, but it seems that was exactly what some believed and taught.

The truth is that if we CONFESS our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (verses 8-9).

This reminds me of the parable Jesus gave about the self-righteous Pharisee and the low-down sinner, as they went to pray in the Temple. The self-righteous fellow, was thanking God he was not like this sinful person and that sinful fellow. But the low-down (in the world's estimation) man, was not filled with pomp and vanity and self-righteousness. He just kept his head low and simply said, "Father, forgive me, I'm a sinner." Jesus said it was that humble fellow that was justified, made clean, forgiven, not the vain self-righteous one.

Jesus did not give this parable to teach we should go around always with our head down to the ground, and feeling like we have just got out of the pig pen we fell into. Jesus gave that parable to teach us to be humble, to realize we are human, and although we are God's children, we do still sin, and we need to ask for the forgiveness of our sins. The moment we lose that perspective on life as a Christian, we are in BIG TROUBLE!

Well, from verse 10, it seems that was not the only false doctrine going around about sin and the Christian, or about sin period. It would seem some were teaching WE HAVE NOT SINNED! That idea of course would lead people to believe they needed no Savior, hence there was no need for Jesus Christ, and a new gospel, which was not THE gospel, was going around. And that kind of teaching was about as contrary as you could get, away from the truth of Jesus Christ, and from the truth that all the first century apostles taught.

John did not WANT the spiritual children he was writing too, to sin! No Christian in their right mind wants other Christians to sin (John gives a definition of sin in chapter 3:4)....BUT IF ANY PERSON DOES SIN

CHAPTER 29

THE 1ST EPISTLE OF JOHN (PART 2)

1 John 2

John writes to his spiritual little children (John was much older than most of them), that they SIN NOT! It is to be the mind attitude for all Christians that they do not want to sin. And no Christian should want to see any other Christian sin. BUT, we are human, still in this flesh and we do at times, sin!

John says that if we sin we do have an advocate, someone who pleads for us, an intercessor between us the Father, and that someone is Christ Jesus, the holy and righteous One. Jesus is our at-one-ment (atoning) - propitiation for our sins, and His life and His sacrifice on the cross is great enough for the sins of the whole world, for every single person who was and will be on this planet,(verses 1-2).

John gives us truth that is plain and easy to understand, it is as Paul once said, "The simplicity that is in Christ Jesus. "Here is HOW we can KNOW that we KNOW Him, "IF we KEEP His COMMANDMENTS" (verse 3).

Now, isn't that simple? How simpler can you have it to understand the bottom line of the very basic truth of God on how you can KNOW that you are His child? Jesus' commandments are the Father's commandments. Jesus said that He and the Father are ONE! Jesus said He did the will of His Father, that He spoke the words His Father told Him to speak. All that is in the Gospels. To teach that Jesus set up His own commandments and "did away" with the basic commandments given in the Old Testament (especially the Ten Commandments), is just not reading the Gospels with a clear mind, you'd have to be a little "tipsy" in the head, to think such an idea. Jesus kept the Father's will and commandments PERFECTLY!

John says, "He that says, 'I know Him,' and keeps NOT His commandments is a LIAR, and the truth is NOT in Him" (verse 4).

Again, HOW SIMPLE! No theological degree is needed to understand such plain words. Reading the New Testament as a child would read it, you should have come to see easily, that the Ten Commandments, every single one of them, have NEVER been "done away with."

The reason we have religious teachers out there who would like to have the Ten Commandments abolished, is because of the FOURTH ONE! This is really the bottom line for such crazy theology, some just do not like what the 4th commandment clearly says (read them in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5) - the SEVENTH DAY is holy to God, we are told to REMEMBER IT, to KEEP it holy!

It is not the first day or the third day or the fifth day that is the holy Sabbath of the Lord, it is the SEVENTH DAY! And not one single, not one single phrase in the New Testament makes the first day holy, or tells us to keep the first day (Sunday) holy, or instructs us that the weekly Sabbath has been changed from the SEVENTH day to the FIRST day!

Growing up as a child I thought Sunday was God's Holy Day, not one person told me different, until I was 18 years old. It hit me like a bomb-shell. I had to realize, hard though it was, that all the Christianity I knew was in ERROR, total out and out error.

The second shock was that MOST in the churches (especially the leaders, KNEW Sunday was not the Seventh day but the first day). It was indeed a shock to think so many could be wrong, it is one of the biggest CUNNING deception of the one who can come as an angel light. Making it all look so good and so nice, with fancy and smooth words so people will fall for it hook line and sinker. I did not write the Fourth commandment of the TEN, God did, and hasn't changed one word of it. It's still the same today as it was in Jesus' day. Jesus observed the Sabbath rest day, we are told it was His custom to visit the Synagogue on the Sabbath. That is also written in the Gospels.

It's really that SIMPLE, if you have the mind of a child, it was me as a kid growing up, and Jesus also said that unless you become as little children you will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

Of course we have other commandments of the Lord, and so it is as Jesus said in Matthew 4:4; we must be willing to live by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.

Whoever keeps the Lord word in that person the LOVE OF GOD is perfected, and we KNOW that we are IN Him (verse 4-5). The question is: What is the love of God? John DEFINES it for us, no need to guess and speculate, or "have an opinion" as opposed to the next guys opinion. Here it is, John interpreting his own phrase: "For this IS THE LOVE OF GOD, that we KEEP His COMMANDMENTS," and note the last part of the verse, "and His commandments are NOT grievous" (1 John 5:3).

Now, many "Christians" and many leaders in Christianity, are going to tell you the commandments of God ARE grievous! They may not tell you that in plain words, but they do tell you that in their life and in their teaching, that the FOURTH commandment is not for today, that one you can ignore, whether it be the FIRST or SEVENTH day you "go to church on." Most will tell you after a few hours in church you can do your own thing. And most will certainly NOT tell you it is the SEVENTH day you are to remember to keep holy.

Look at verse 6 of this first chapter of 1 John. If you say you abide in Christ, you OUGHT TO WALK AS HE WALKED!

Oh, the simplicity of Christ, oh the simplicity of these verses John is writing. Yes, indeed a CHILD can understand these verses. Now, people with "theological degrees" may have a hard time, people who have gone to "Bible Seminary Schools" for 4 or 5 years, may have a hard time understanding these verses, but I guarantee a child left to himself to read the New Testament, will NOT have difficulty with such clear verses.

If you claim you abide in the Lord, then you better PROVE IT, by FOLLOWING in His steps! Just read the Gospels, and see HOW Christ lived. What did He believe? What did He teach? What Sabbath day did He observe? What set of Festivals did He keep? It's all there in the Gospels.

I'm telling you friends, Jesus' children are the VERY LITTLE flock, just as He said they were, and DECEPTION is LARGE and abounding, so much so that Jesus said at the end time, it would be so abounding that IF it was possible even the ELECT would be deceived!

John goes on to say, that he is not writing new things, but old things, the old commandment is the very word that goes back to the beginning. Yet, John does add a new commandment (because darkness is past and true light now shines). He that says he is in the light but hates his brother, is in darkness. If you abide in the light you will love your brother, and you will not act to bring scandal (margin note) or be privy to scandal.

Again, it is obvious, John said this because some were hating others. If the love of God is in you, it is not possible to hate people, no matter what their religion (if they have one) or not. Is there someone you really dislike? Dislike so much that it is a hate attitude you have. It would seem SOME people do hate others because they will kill (literally) others, in the name of their "god" (I use a small letter "g") or religion.

Such people who hate others, John says, walk in darkness, the darkness has blinded their eyes, they just do not know the path of truth and righteousness, period! (verses 8-11).

John now acts like a real father figure to his readers. He says to the little ones in Christ, their sins are forgiven for Jesus' name sake. He writes to the "fathers" - more mature and older Christians, because they have known Jesus from the beginning, they know what He is like and so conform to Him. He writes to "young men" - those who are not new or little children in the faith, but not in the faith long enough to be classified as "fathers." He write to them, because they have overcome THE WICKED ONE (Satan the Devil and his deceptions).

He goes back to the "little children" in Christ, because they have come to KNOW the Father. He writes to the "fathers" because they KNOW Him that is from the beginning. He writes to the "young men" because they are STRONG in spiritual matters, and strong in the Word of God, that abides in them; and they have overcome THE WICKED ONE.

All in all, every part of this contained in verses 12-14, should belong to ALL Christians. All that John lists to each specific group, must become the WHOLE of those that are IN the Father, and IN Christ.

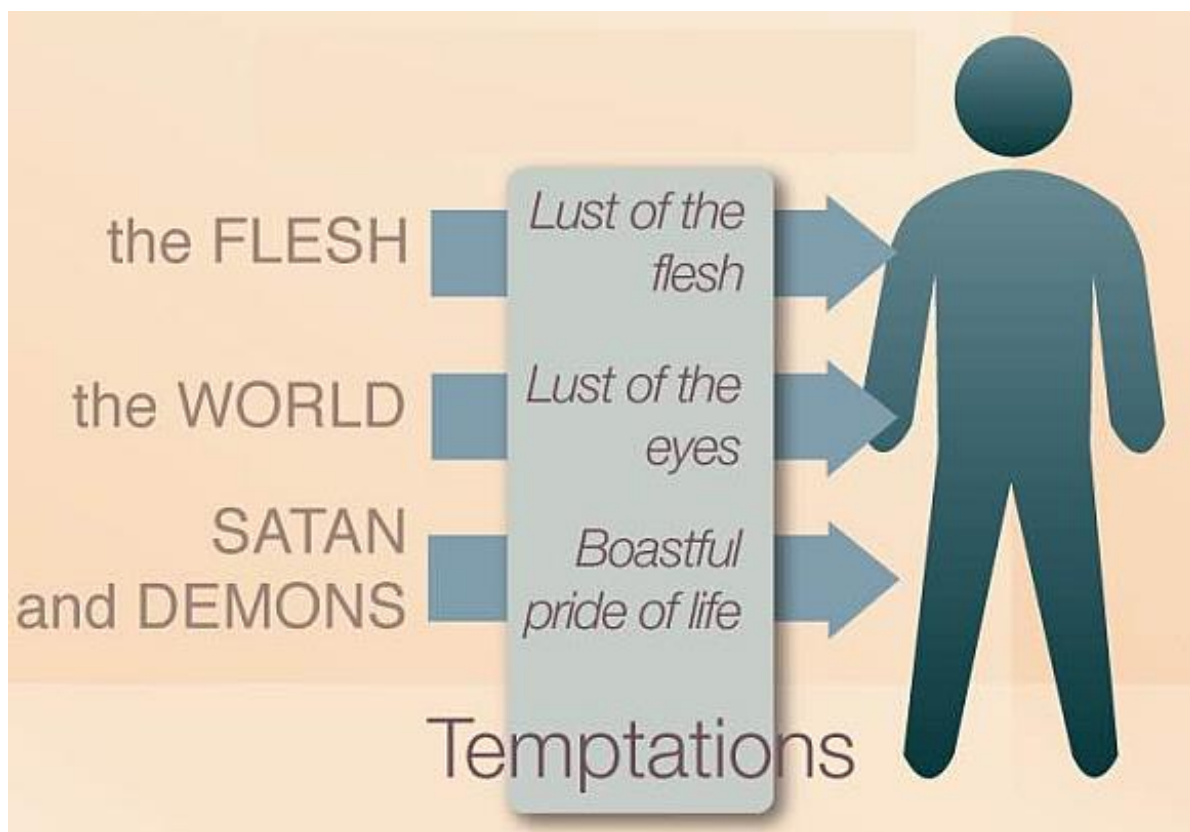
You can only become ALL of this, if you WALK daily with God, if you have a mind that is ON Him and His Word and Way of life. You need to be studying His Word, searching the Scriptures, meditating on His Word and His commandments. You need to have the right kind of the fear of the Lord. You will not care what people think of you, what co-workers think of your religion, what relatives think of the way you live in serving God.

And as John then goes on to say, you will NOT "Love the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (verse 15).

Does this mean you have to be some kind of "stay at home" or "never leave the house" type (just to work and that's it)? Does it mean ALL and everything outside of "church" is bad and evil? OF COURSE NOT! I love to Square Dance. There is not evil in Square Dancing per se. There is no evil in joining a Tennis club, if you like to play Tennis. There is no evil in joining a Golf club if you like to Golf. I'm also into "horses" and have a beautiful Golden Palomino Quarter horse (she's 7 at the time of this writing in 2007) and so I work part time at the Horse Ranch.

There are MANY THINGS that are outside of the "church" that are not sin to participate in, as long as they do not have you breaking the commandments of God.

John defines "love not the world" for us in verse 16. "For all that is in the world, the LUST of the flesh, the LUST of the eyes, and the PRIDE of life (putting whatever it is, ahead of God, His way, His commandments) is not of the Father, but is of the world."



You could be so good at something (sport, hobby, etc. etc.) that you want to be (and maybe could be) the BEST in the world, a world-champion! But if acquiring that badge of pride, means you have to break the commandments of God, or put serving God to one side, while you go after "the pride of life" - then it becomes SIN! Then it becomes "the lust of the world" to you. And John finishes this thought by telling us that the world (without God) is going to pass away, and all the lusts thereof: BUT he that DOES THE WILL of God, shall ABIDE FOR EVER - that's eternal life friends in the very family of God! (verse 17).

There are some things I would like to do, some things I could have done when younger in the horse world and in the music world, and maybe got some fame here and there, but it meant I would have to disregard the Sabbath, so I did not do it as such. Now, I still enjoy my horse and the horse world, I still enjoy my teaching

guitar/banjo/mandolin and singing cowboy songs, but I make sure THAT all revolves AROUND the Sabbath. And of course doing anything outside of "church" must be decent and moral and within the laws of God, in body, mind, words, and spirit. Everything we do must be with the mind of Christ, and remembering that Satan can pervert anything.

Look at verse 18! Mark it! It's a lesson in "time, as God sees time." John was inspired to say IN HIS day that it was "the last time" - the "last age." It is possible John did think that the return of Christ was not too far away, if not in his life time, then in the lifetime of many of his readers. As we have seen, God does not view "time" as we view it. I want you to go back to the book of Hebrews, you may have missed it, or forgotten it. Hebrews 1:2. Paul said Jesus had spoken to them, when in the flesh, in "these last days." So "last days" - "last time" - can be understood that it is such for 2,000 years, that we are STILL IN "the last time."

John, like the apostle Paul (2 Thes.2) understood there would come in the very end, THE anti-Christ, THE one man that is called in the book of Revelation, "THE false prophet!" Yes, there will be such a man, at the very end of this age, the book of Revelation shows he will come just before Jesus returns, because when Christ does come He will cast that false prophet into the fire - see Revelation 19:20).

But BEFORE "THE" man of sin comes, John said that MANY anti-christs were ALREADY there in the Roman world! Wow! MANY already preaching things contrary to the teachings of Christ. Again, let me ask you, if it was so in John's time, at the end of the first century A.D. HOW MANY DO YOU SUPPOSE HAVE BEEN AND ARE STILL OUT THERE ON THIS PLANET EARTH?

Many of these anti-christs were once a part of the very true Church of God during the apostles' time. But they did not stay true to the faith once delivered. They left the true body of Christ, but you can guarantee they were busy forming as large a following after themselves, as possible. They went out so they might be made manifest to the very Elect of God. The elect KNOW the true teachings of the Lord, and they so know the anti-christs, who they are. And I tell you, there are WAY MORE, yes, WAY MORE anti-christs out there than there are true servants and ministers of God.

He tells his readers that they have an anointing (function) from the Holy One, and so they can know all the truths of the Holy One. Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would come and would LEAD His true followers into ALL TRUTH (John 16). All truth does not always come at one time. Most of the time, God gives you one truth, and then another truth, and then another. As you are willing to love truth and search the Scriptures for truth, they the Lord leads you into more of the truth. And this working of the Spirit also entails that you are willing to be CORRECTED! Willing to admit ERROR, and LOVE the truth.

John was pretty sure his readers were being led by the Holy Spirit and knew the basic truths of God. He knew his readers could ascertain a LIE.

One of the lies going around at this time in John's life, was that Jesus was NOT the Christ, the "anointed one." Once more John makes it simple, IF you do not accept Jesus as the very anointed Son of God, then you DENY BOTH the Father and the Son.

The Islamic religion accepts Christ as "a prophet" of God, but they DO NOT accept Jesus as the VERY ANOINTED SON of God the Father. Being blunt, the Islamic religion is anti-christ. Those who belong to the Islamic faith, WILL NOT be in the FIRST resurrection to be with Christ when He returns. I did not say they will go to hell, far from it, as it is with many others who are spiritually blinded, most will have their day of salvation, but they will not be in the first resurrection, unless of course God calls them in this lifetime to see the truth and repent of error.

If you deny the Son as the very Son of God, you also deny the Father. Once more John is as straight as an arrow, he pulls no punches, some things he states are just black verses white, so white are some truths of God, that there is no black whatsoever in the white, just cannot be shaded anything else but pure white.

John urges his readers to let that which has been in them from the start CONTINUE in them. If they stay with the Spirit of truth, then they have BOTH the Father and the Son.

That being the case, then the Father has PROMISED to give them eternal life (verses 19-25). John has written this epistle because it was needed to counter those who were seducing them with false doctrines and teachings (verse 26).

Then we come to words of John that some have taken OUT OF CONTEXT, and come up with some pretty far out ideas. He says that if the anointing they have remain in them, then they "NEED NO MAN TEACH YOU!" But the anointing will teach you, and it is truth, and does not lie, even as it has already taught them, and so they can abide in it ("it" - see margin).

Okay then, you can all stay off my website, close down your computer, and even close up the book of 1 John, and still further, you can forget about reading the epistles of Paul, and James, and Jude, and Matthew, Mark, Luke, and the Gospel of John. For THEY were men! And John has just said you need no man teach you, only the Holy Spirit. So why on earth did John continue writing, after this verse, and why did he even write two other epistles besides this one, if no man need teach them, if they only needed the Holy Spirit.

And if that is the case why was Paul inspired to write that God HAS PUT SOME in the church, to be apostles, some evangelists, some prophets, and some pastors and teachers? (see Ephesians 4:11-12).

Obviously, John is NOT contradicting the rest of the New Testament. The CONTEXT, is that of "false" ministers coming and teaching false doctrines. John is saying to them, that because they have the Holy Spirit, because they have been led to the basic truths of God, because they KNOW these truths, they should not give ANY time of day to these men who are indeed anti-christs. Those fellows have nothing important as far as the foundational truths of God are concerned, so don't allow them to try and teach you on those basic foundational truths. It is also the instruction of John, if you have not already closed up your Bible, that some people on some issues you do not even allow into your home, and you do not even wish them God speed (2 John 10-11).

John finishes his thoughts in this chapter by encouraging them to stay IN Christ. We are back to the simple things again. Look at Christ, read the Gospels, see what

Christ taught and practiced, then IMITATE HIM! In so doing we shall not be ashamed before Him at His coming again to earth.

John ends this section with, "If you KNOW that He is RIGHTEOUS, you KNOW that everyone that DOETH (practices as a way of life) RIGHTEOUSNESS is a part of His family" (my rendition) - (verses 27-29).

What is RIGHTEOUSNESS? Here it is friends. Mark it, do not forget it - the Bible interprets itself - Psalm 119:172.

God's COMMANDMENTS are RIGHTEOUSNESS!

CHAPTER 30

THE 1ST EPISTLE OF JOHN (PART 3)

1 John 3

"Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knows us not, because it knew Him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And every man that has this hope in himself purifies himself, even as He is pure" (verses 1-3).

WHAT VERSES THEY ARE! I want you to read them again, very slowly, let it sink in deep into your mind.

True Christians are TODAY, NOW, the SONS of God, not the sons of some angel, like Gabriel, but SONS of the FATHER! Paul in Hebrews chapter two said that Jesus is NOT ASHAMED to call US - BRETHREN - His very literal brothers and sisters!

Oh, most of Christianity, says the words, "children of God," or "sons of God," - they go around flippantly talking about being God's children, but I tell you MOST really do NOT KNOW the DEPTH of such language, and what being SONS of the Father REALLY MEANS!

We are NOW God's children, BUT - and here's a big "but" - IT DOES NOT YET APPEAR WHAT WE SHALL BE! We are one day going to LOOK LIKE Jesus Christ NOW LOOKS LIKE! And we are given a glimpse as to how He looks like in GLORY form in the first chapter of the book of Revelation. Read it for yourselves.

These first few verses of this chapter in 1 John, is really ... there are no words to put it in our language, it is truly mind-blowing. But then it is also simple to read, just believe it for what it clearly says. One day we shall BE LIKE Jesus is now.

The apostle Paul goes into more detail in the famous "resurrection" chapter of 1 Corinthians. We shall in the future be GLORIFIED, have bodies that shine like stars, be PERFECT in every way. We shall YET INHERIT the Kingdom of God, the very FAMILY of God, with all that that means. The Father is wanting to SHARE ALL that He has with US! Perfection, glory, power, bright holy light and all that He is. I have written a full in-depth study on this matter. It is called "A Christian's Destiny." Please read and meditate on it all.

As John says, when we have this sure hope within us, the knowledge of it all, we shall DESIRE in attitude of mind, to want to LIVE PURE, even as our Father and Elder Brother are pure.

To give emphasis to this attitude of mind concerning living pure, John goes on to AMPLIFY it.

So I will use the AMPLIFIED BIBLE in this section, as it brings out the true meaning of the Greek tenses used.

"Everyone who commits (practices) sin is guilty of lawlessness; for (that is what) sin is, lawlessness (the breaking, violating of God's law by transgression or neglect - being unrestrained and unregulated by His commands and His will). You know that he appeared in visible form and became Man to take away (upon Himself) sins, and in Him there is no sin (essentially and forever). No one who abides in him (who lives and remains in communion with and in obedience to Him - deliberately, knowingly, and habitually) commits (practices) sin. No one who (habitually) sins has either seen or known Him (recognized, perceived, or understood Him, or has had an experiential acquaintance with Him).

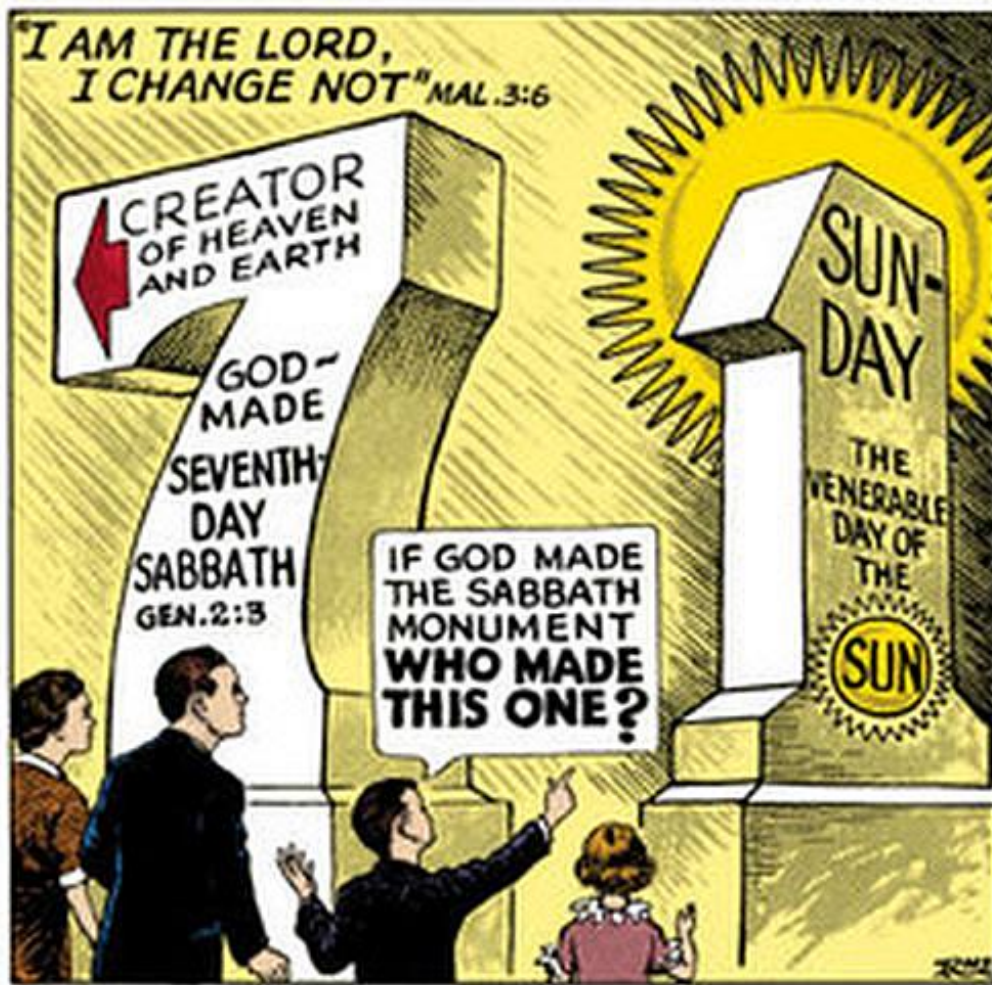
"Boys (lads), let no one deceive you and lead you astray. He who practices righteousness (who is upright, conforming to the divine will in purpose, thought, and action, living a consistently conscientious life), is righteous, even as He is righteous. (But) he who commits sin (who practices evil doing) is of the Devil (takes his character from the evil one), for the Devil has sinned (violated the divine law) from the beginning. The reason the Son of God was made manifest (visible) was to undo (destroy, loosen, and dissolve) the works the Devil (has done).

"No one born (begotten) of God (deliberately, knowingly, and habitually practices sin, for God's nature abides in him (His principle of life, the divine sperm, remains permanently within him); and he cannot practice sinning because he is born (begotten) of God. By this it is made clear who take their nature from God and are His children and who take their nature from the Devil and are his children: no one who does not practice righteousness (who does not conform to God's will in purpose, thought, and action) is of God; neither is anyone who does not love his brother (his fellow believer in Christ)" (verses 4-10).

There it is in clear language as the Greek tenses mean. First, sin is the breaking of the law of God, the commandments of God. Paul understood that fact and made it PLAIN to us in Romans 7:7-12. He had not known sin except the law had said

All that is in the Ten Commandments, the breaking, the LIVING a life style that is breaking any one of them, IS SIN! I've already given you the Bible definition of "righteousness" - it is God's commandments (Ps.119:172). If you really know that you know God, you will have His nature in you. You will have an attitude of mind, that is willing to be LED by the Spirit of God, to be corrected, to love to grow in grace and knowledge. You will want to DO, to PRACTICE, as a WAY OF LIFE, the commandments of the Father. The nature of God in you, cannot possibly lead you to IGNORE or NOT practice the commandments of God. You will desire to NOT sin, you will want to live the way of God.

I ask you, how can it possibly be that someone who claims they are a child of God, is going around taking God's or Christ's name in vain, as you hear the unconverted doing all around you every day? It cannot be possible! How can it be possible that someone who claims to be a Christian goes around coveting or lust after this and that, as a way of life? It cannot be! How is it possible that a person claiming to be a son of God can trample all over the Sabbath day, and not obey the fourth commandment. It cannot be! But I tell you there are HUNDREDS if not THOUSANDS of "ministers" around the world, who will not teach people to obey the fourth commandment. They themselves do not keep holy the seventh day, and they will not teach others to do it.



You have it in plain words from the apostle John, the one who lived to the end of the first century to see a "religious movement" LEAVE from the true Church of God, and go out to lead people AWAY from the commandments of God, and that movement wanted to still call themselves "children of God."

John makes it pretty clear that such people with such a mind-set, and who teach others to have the same mind as themselves, are NOT the children of God. You can read it again and see for yourself whose children they are. Yes, John was inspired to pull no punches at times.

John ended that thought going back to NOT loving people. He continues with that thought with verse 11 through to 18.

The message from the very beginning was that we as children of God, must love our fellow man. We are not to follow the example of Cain, who was under the power and influence of the Devil. Cain was jealous of Abel. Cain knew his works, his way of life was not the way of God. He also knew that Abel's life was centered around serving and living according to the Divine will and commandments of the Most High God.

We as children desiring to do the will of God, should not be surprised that the world will hate us. At best they sure will not understand us. If you truly follow the Lord in your living as this Bible Story shows you what the Lord's will is, many of your friends

and relatives will think you are "nuts" - they will think you have gone off the deep-end into some "strange" religion.

One of the ways you can know you have passed from death to life, is because you have love towards all people. Those who cannot do that (and you have killings every day from people who cannot love all people, no matter what their religion or philosophy is) are in the company of the Devil and death. If you "hate" your brother (and Jesus gave the parable of the "good Samaritan" to show everyone is our brother), you cannot possibly have eternal life in you. You are a murderer if you have hate in your heart towards any other person. Do you see how the New Testament does not abolish the Ten Commandments, it **AMPLIFIES THEM**, just as Jesus did in the famous "Sermon on the mount."

You may not like, you may and can "hate" the SIN, of people, but you must love the sinner.

John now gets to the real down to earth application of loving your brother. He reminds us that God, in the form of Jesus Christ, **LAI D DOWN** his life for us. The Greek tense here is "aorist" - an action done and completed in the sometime past. There was an historical moment when Jesus did literally die, and was dead for three days and three night. So, John says, we ought to "lay down" our lives for the brethren. The Greek "lay down" is in the "present" tense, which means, a continual present. We are, as a way of life, living to serve others. We are continually to want to help others, in whatever way we can.

John tells you that this is indeed what he is meaning here (even if you do not know the Greek tenses - see the Bible is not just written for only "scholars" of Hebrew or Greek, but for children also) because he goes on to say: "Whosoever has this world's physical goods, and sees his brother in need of some of them, and just shuts up his physical goods and does not share them with anyone, the love of God cannot be in him" (my own amplification on verse 17).

We are not to just love in word, but in **DEED** (works) and in truth (having the right attitude of mind in doing it all) - verse 18.

There are many ways today to serve and share with others that are less fortunate, or have hit a troublesome time in their lives.

Oh, by-the-way, this verse 18 is a good example of how the Bible can contain verses that give emphasis to part while seemingly shutting off another. The KJV says, "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth." Are we **NOT** to love in word? Can we say all kinds of evil things, with the tongue? No, of course not, the mouth is important, the apostle James as we have seen, gave a good part of a chapter on how evil the tongue can be, which should not be part of the Christian's life. This verse here should then be understood: "My little children, let us not love in word (**ONLY**), neither in tongue (**ONLY**); but in deed and in truth."

If we do what he has just stated, we can know we are of the truth, and can have full assurance before God. If we have misgivings at times about our conduct as a Christian, God is greater than our fleshly mind, He sees **DEEP** within us, knows we are trying our best to live according as He wants. If our heart-mind hardly ever has

misgivings, then we are in super shape spiritually. I guess Job was of the latter. He could not think where he was falling down.

Not many of us get into the spiritual shape Job thought he was in. Mind you, he was in terrific shape, even God said he was, but he did have an area in life that he could not see was a weakness. He never really saw God for what God really was, but he finally did (Job 42), and was blessed beyond measure. So, if we are like a Job then we can sure have confidence before God. Yet if most of us cannot come close to being a Job, all is not lost by any means.

John says in verse 22, that God knows we are trying to keep His commandments, and doing those things that are pleasing to Him. God knows our heart, that it is right towards Him and His way of life, so we have our requests and prayers answered. Now, the answering of those requests may not always be as our human mind would like, and they are not always answered till God decides the best time to answer them. God did not answer Job right away, but He did answer, in the right way at the right time.

John sums up his thoughts to end this chapter, with these words: "And this is His commandment, That we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as He gave us commandment. And he that keepeth His commandments dwelleth in Him, and He in them. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which He has given us" (verses 23-24).

Ah, we are back to Jesus as Savior, no salvation outside of Christ, pure and simple, and just as pure and just as simple, God's children will keep His commandments! And all this is done through the very Spirit of God, which He gives to those who obey Him (Acts 5:32).

CHAPTER 31

THE 1ST EPISTLE OF JOHN (PART 4)

1 John 4

There are TWO themes that run throughout the three epistles of John. One concerns what the nature of a true child of God is, what manifests itself in daily living, and that of course is having the very nature and love on God coming into the person through the Holy Spirit, which is then really the very persons of the Father and of the Son Christ Jesus coming into and living within that individual (see what Jesus said in the Gospel of John, chapter 14:23).

The other concern for John, living as he did until the end of the first century A.D. was the profuse "false prophets" or teachers that had come along. First they were in the Church of God, then they went out of it, and started their own religion of MYSTERY BABYLON the great as the book of Revelation calls it. Those false teachers called it "Christianity" - it outwardly looked like the true religion of God, even with "nice sounding theology" and spiritual words, but it was all really a sham. It was Babylon Mystery Religion, dressed up in Christian terms and platitudes.

Part of this false Christian religion is the untrue teaching that Jesus Christ cannot really come and live His life over again inside you, and that this new body of Christ, that is not the body of Christ, can change doctrines, add doctrines, change certain commandments of God, under the banner of "the grace of God" for the New Testament age.

So it is that John, in chapter four, moves back to the subject of "false prophets" or teachers. He tells his readers to NOT BELIEVE every "spiritual" Christian sounding doctrine that comes along. He tells them and so us today, we are to TRY the spirits, to see if they really are from God, because MANY, not the few, but MANY false prophets are out there.

How do we TRY or test the "spirit" - the "teaching" - the "theology" - well the Bereans knew how to do it, when the apostle Paul came teaching among them (Acts 17) - they went to the Word of God, and searched the Scriptures DAILY, to see if what was being said, stacked up to and was in agreement with God's Word. It takes time and effort to do that. Most people will just not be willing to take the time and effort to study the Scriptures, say with a Bible Concordance, like Strong's Concordance, and of course by reading the Bible from cover to cover, putting verse with verse. All that does take time, and most people just haven't got the time, so they believe, and they have been taught that it does not really matter anyway. They have been taught that you choose the "church of your choice" and as long as you have "nice" thoughts about God, you'll get to heaven.

Some have thought from verses 2 and 3 of this chapter that a great false teaching was going around in the last part of John's life, that Jesus did not really come in the flesh. Now, there may have been such a teaching by some to that effect. But as I'll show you, this is not the false idea that John was speaking against. There would have been FAR TOO MANY people STILL ALIVE, with John, who had LITERALLY SEEN AND HEARD Jesus speak, seen and heard about His miracles. From 30 A.D.

when Jesus was crucified to near the end of the century, was only 60 to 70 years, as John was writing this epistle. There would have certainly been MANY children at Christ's day, who would have seen and heard and remembered the astonishing things that this man called Jesus Christ did. I doubt at John's time, the teaching that Jesus had never lived as a physical flesh person, would have gained much support. The large amount of evidence from various people alive at Christ's time and alive at John's time, would have deadened such a "theological" teaching in the world of Jewish or Christian religion.

No, that was not the insidious false teaching coming from these false prophets. The Greek tense for "is come" in both verse 2 and 3, is the Greek "perfect" tense. Now the perfect tense in Greek means: "The perfect conveys the DOUBLE notion of an action terminated in the past time, and of its effect existing in the present..." (The Analytical Greek Lexicon, 1977).

Jesus Christ HAD COME in the past, completed action, but the effects of His coming was still present. Or put it this way, as Jesus Himself put it. He came from the Father, lived and taught according to the words the Father gave Him, lived a sinless life, and died on the cross as mankind's at-one-ment sacrifice. That He would rise from the dead, return to the Father, and send the Holy Spirit to come and dwell WITHIN the saints of God. As mentioned above, this means that BOTH the Father and the Son are living inside the child of God (ref. John 14:23).

It is exactly as Paul said in Galatians 2:20; "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me; and the life that I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

Allowing God the Father and Christ, through the Holy Spirit to live IN you, is allowing them to live THEIR LIVES in you. It is conforming to their will, their desires, their standards, their "theology" you might say. It is as Jesus taught, living by every word of God. Not the words of men, not the ideas of men, not the "theology" of men, not the teachings of men, but LIVING BY THE WORDS OF GOD!

Anyone who does not teach this basic truth of the New Testament, that Christ lives over again inside of His followers, which then includes obeying God's commandments, is a false prophet, a false teacher. We have already seen John makes it very plain and simple to understand, if you call yourself a Christian, you will walk after Christ.

So, here is what John was saying to his readers, "Hereby know you the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ DID COME and the EFFECT of that is to continue COMING into (the Greek "en" can and often does mean "into") the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesses NOT that Jesus Christ HAS COME and the effect of that is to CONTINUE to come in the flesh, is NOT of God: and this is that spirit of anti-christ, whereof you have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world."

The whole immediate and afterwards context of John's writing is to repeat over and over again that Christians are to live, walk, think, act, as God the Father and Christ Jesus, think and act. MANY it was foretold would come (ref. Matt.24:24 to deceive even the elect if possible) and in John's end time of life, HAD come, who were teaching that it did not matter that much if they did not live like Christ lived, in all

points. By the end of the first century A.D. there was a movement in so-called "Christian" circles to observe the FIRST day of the week, and not the SEVENTH, as Jesus did. There was by John's latter life, a movement to depart from observing the Passover and move towards Easter observance. So important was this that in the first half of the second century, POLYCRATES of Asia Minor went all the way to Rome to DEBATE this issue with the bishop of Rome, saying to him that he received his observance from no other than the apostle John himself. By the way this act of Polycrates shows the Church of God had not YET completely split away from the church of Rome.

It's all in the history books of Christian literature. Such false teachers may not have, in so many words said to people, "Well Jesus is not, cannot, live inside you." But the teaching they held and taught to others, was in final bottom line reality, saying that very thing. Most teachers of the "Christian" religion sure are not going to put it like that to you in those plain words, but the way they live, the things they observe, the teachings they put forth, "speak VOLUMES" as the saying goes.

The deception by saying "That's only for the Jews" or "That's Jewish, we don't have to follow that" is indeed the deception of teaching that John is addressing here in these first verses of chapter four.

Jesus was A JEW, but He was first the Son of God, who did the Father's will and commandments. If anyone says that Jesus cannot live inside you and still do the Father's will and commandments, they are anti-christ as John bluntly called it.

He gives his readers a positive in verse 4. He tells them he knows they are of God, and have overcome the false teachers, because for one important reason, greater is He that is in them, than he that is in the world greater is God the Father than Satan the Devil in other words. But the world on a whole follows false teachings, and people like it that way, so the false minister will teach and preach what the general world likes to hear. But those of God, those who are in tune with God, those who know the Father's word, they will recognize who speaks the Father's word. Hence the spirit of error and truth is made manifest to them (verses 4-6). As Jesus said, though false prophets would abound in the last days, the elect cannot be deceived.

And as He is, it is imperative that Christians love one another, it is a standard that is part of being a true child of God (verse 7).

God is LOVE (verse 8), but let's ask the question, can we find a Bible definition of "love" in simple terms? Paul expounded true love in 1 Corinthians 13, but for a simple definition we just need to keep reading and we'll come to it in John's epistle in chapter 5:3! There it is, back we go again to what John also puts emphasis on in these three epistles - THE LOVE OF GOD IS THE KEEPING OF HIS COMMANDMENTS!

John reiterates in the next few verses, ONE specific of God's love. The sending of His only begotten Son to die for sins and to make eternal life possible for mankind. It was God who FIRST loved us, not the other way around. God makes the first step in love, not us. He sent His Son to be the at-one-ment for our sins (the propitiation) - the atoning sacrifice that takes away our sins.

With that in mind, as it always should be, then it becomes much easier for us to love others, or at least it should be easier. If you truly have the Spirit of God, then it is relatively easy to love others (verses 7-11).

Verse 12 is an eye opener. John says NO MAN HAS SEEN GOD AT ANY TIME! Putting verse with verse, we know it is written that Moses DID SEE the hind part of God (Exodus 33). So, without going into all the other verses in the Bible (the one in Exodus 33 is enough), the "God" that some people DID SEE at times throughout history, was the ONE BEING of the Godhead that BECAME the person of Jesus the Christ. It is a truth that I have covered in depth on many other studies on my website. I will ask the reader to study them.

NOT ONE human person from the time of Adam, has EVER seen God the FATHER. God the Father has never appeared to or spoken with any human person. That will all change as we are told in Revelation chapter 21. When all the plan of salvation for mankind is completed, when the new earth and new heaven are established, then God the Father will come, together with the heavenly Jerusalem, to the new earth, and GOD THE FATHER shall be with all of His children. Then we shall meet Him, see Him, talk to Him, as Father to son. Oh, what a breath-taking day that will be. Until then, we shall have to be patient, and as Jesus said to His disciples, "If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father." But, you bet, it sure will be great to see the Father in person!

Part of being in God, being a son of God, is to confess, admit, recognize, that Jesus the Christ, is the very SON of God, and the Father sent Him to be the Savior of the world. There are MILLIONS today and yesterday, who will not admit this fact. The Jews at large, the Islamic people at large. One day they will come to see and admit that Jesus is the very Son of God.

God is LOVE, and he that dwells in love, dwells in God, and God in him. John puts it in a simple short sentence, but in that sentence is the whole book and words of John, and of course the whole New Testament.

Love is as we shall come to see (and as we have seen already) is KEEPING the COMMANDMENTS of God. And so, if doing, if in that mind-set to obey the Father, we can have boldness in the day of judgment. [And the people of God are having judgment NOW as they live (1 Peter 4:17)].

So as is God, so we live, we desire to follow in the steps of Christ. And that attitude CASTS OUT fear, the fear that brings torment (see Hebrews 10:26-31). If we have that wrong fear, it is because we have turned our back of God's way of life, and that type of fear cannot make perfection in love - no spiritual growth can come about, no moving towards spiritual maturity can be accomplished in and under that tent of fear (verses 13-18).

John finishes his thoughts in this chapter by stressing once more, God is love, we love Him because He first loved us and if anyone say he loves God and hates his fellow man, he is just a plain liar: for he that loves not his brother, whom he can see, how can he possibly love God whom he has not seen?

It is one of God's commandments: That he who loves God must love his brother also! (verses 19-21).

If all the people in the world who claim to worship "God" would just obey this ONE commandment, what a different world we would have today. The news on TV every day from various parts of the world, would not contain all the killing and violence people commit against each other under the name of God's "religion."

So we continue to pray, "Thy Kingdom come" when all people will walk in the LOVE of God!

CHAPTER 32

THE 1ST EPISTLE OF JOHN (PART 5)

1 John 5

It is paramount that to be a child of the Father, you must believe that Jesus is the very Christ, and believing that you can be begotten of God, and so it is that everyone who loves God the Father that begat someone, also loves those who are begotten of God. John is back once more to giving emphasis that the children of God, love each other.

He goes on to inter-twine the loving of people with the loving of God and the keeping of His commandments. They are inseparable, glove and hand, horse and carriage, as we say. It is like blood and air, we cannot separate the two, both are absolutely tied together. We cannot live without blood in our body and we cannot live without air to breath into our body.

Love of God and the keeping of His commandments, means, automatically, we shall love the children of God (verses 1-2).

HERE IT IS AGAIN! A straight to the face, clear definition of what IS the love of God:

"FOR THIS IS THE LOVE OF GOD, that we KEEP His COMMANDMENTS: and His commandments are NOT grievous!" (verse 3).

Some would try to tell you God's commandments are grievous, especially the FOURTH one. They would try to tell you that it is just near impossible in the working world today to observe the fourth commandment. That is simply not true. Many millions around the world observe the fourth commandment each and every week.

It does take FAITH to follow and obey God's commandments, but John knows that those who are begotten of God have overcome the pressures of the world, and it is their faith that gives them the victory. It is those who truly believe that Jesus is the very Son of God. It is they as Paul said about himself, who have Jesus living in them, Christ in them, and the life they live is by the very faith of Christ (Galatians 2:20).

John reaffirms the fact that Jesus did live on this earth, that He did become human flesh. The "water" and "blood" that John speaks about in verses 6-8 are probably two sets of the facts. Jesus was born of a woman, came as a physical child comes into this world, water and blood come forth in the natural child birth process. Also Jesus had blood running through His body, showing He was very human in the physical life, and He was baptized in water by John the Baptist, that as Jesus Himself said, "that all righteousness should be fulfilled."

And with all of that, there was the very SPIRIT of God to testify that all this was true. So the three together make a bond and intertwined cord that cannot be broken. All three are in agreement that Jesus was the Christ, the very Son of God.

Verse 7 in the KJV Bible WAS NOT in the original Greek. Many Bible Commentaries (such as the Wycliffe Bible Commentary) will give you the facts on that verse, and

tell you how that verse entered the KJV Bible. The NKJV Study Bible, says that most scholars now agree that starting with the word "heaven" in verse 7 through to "on earth" in verse 8, were not in the original Greek.

There are then three that bear witness to Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God; water; blood; and the Spirit of God.

The witness of men, who lived and many of them still living in John's latter life, bear witness that Jesus was the Christ and was indeed a physical human person who lived not that far back in Jewish history (from when John was writing this epistle). But, if the witness of men was great, the witness of God through the Holy Spirit was even greater.

If you do not believe God, and His witness of the Spirit, then you make God out to be a liar, you are saying the Father really did not send His Son into the world. It must be just that clear cut in your mind and belief, either God is witnessing with the truth or He is a liar.

For those who are fully assured that the three (blood, water and Spirit) do agree and do witness to God sending His Son, then there is the concrete record that God has given to us eternal life, through His son. And he that has the Son of God in their life as personal Saviour and Lord, they have eternal life in them. He that does not have Jesus as Lord and Savior, does NOT have eternal life in them. Once more it is just that simple. As all the New Testament teaches, there is NO SALVATION, NO ETERNAL LIFE, outside of Christ Jesus. The religions of the world that do not have Christ as Lord and Saviour, as the very Son of the Most High One, do not have salvation or eternal life. There is indeed only ONE name under heaven whereby you can be saved - Jesus Christ, see Acts 4:12 (verses 6-12).

John writes all these things in this epistle so they that do believe in the name of Jesus as the Son of God, can have assurance, can KNOW that they have eternal life in them. How can you KNOW that you KNOW you have eternal life in you, well by reading the things John has written in this epistle. We have been reading them. If you believe them and are living them as a way of life, then God is in you. If that is so, if you are living the things John is writing about, then we can have confidence in Him, if we ask anything that is according to God's will, He will hear us, and we shall be given them. We do have to remember in all that being said, God will answer in His time and will give what is best for us concerning the answers to our petitions. We should also have the attitude as Jesus had in being able to say, "Not my will be done, but your will be done" with some of our petitions to the Father.

I often pray that God will bring more and more people, each and every day, around the world, to find and study from my website. The Lord has written that His word shall go forth and shall not return to Him void. I know His will on that issue. He does answer it. I also pray that He will guide me as I write studies, as I expound His word to you, as I find other studies by other people that are truth, to upload to my website, to serve people in growing in grace and knowledge. I know His will on this, and I know He hears and answers it. Those petitions, I do not have to say, "Not my will be done, but your will be done." Then other petitions I may have to add those words, as Jesus did, when He prayed to the Father the night of His arrest in the mount of Olives and Gethsemane (Matt.26).

What is John talking about in verse 16? A sin not unto death? We have seen from John that although we should not want to sin, we fool ourselves if we say we have no sin. Christians fight against the pulls of our nature that tug us to sin, then there is help from the world all around us, in various forms, that tempt us to sin, and on top of all that, we have Satan and his demonic helpers that nag at us to sin. We have the help of God's Spirit, but with all the bombarding of the three aforementioned pulls, we sometimes do not have a great flow of the Spirit in us, and we do at times then, sin! We can at times feel like the apostle Paul did in Romans 7. We do not want to sin, we desire to not want to sin, but the things we want to do, we sometimes do not, and the things we do not want to do, we find ourselves doing them.

Our overall attitude of mind is as Paul's was in Romans 7. Our foundational frame of mind is we do not want to sin, we desire to perform God's will and way of life and commandments. That is our basic living attitude of mind. We have not given up, we have not walked away from God and His way of life. We have not said, "This is too hard to try and live the Lord's way and by His commandments, so I'll just throw in the towel and not try. I'll just go back into the world, and do my own thing, and the world's own things."

We do not have that attitude, and our brothers and sisters in Christ, who are "sticking with it" - trying to follow the righteousness of God, have the same determination in mind as we do.

Then one day we see, or we hear that our brother or sister in Christ, have sinned. If you are very close to a brother or sister in Christ, they may even confide in you, that they have sinned, or they are having some trouble conquering a particular sin. We go to bat for them in our prayers, we ask God to give them the power to rule over that specific sin in their lives. And God will appreciate your prayers and request for them. He will be merciful, He will still forgive their sin, and they will still have eternal life. Their mind, bottom line, foundation, is NOT giving it all up, and just throwing their arms in the air and leaving the Father.

They are not being the seed that gets on to the stony ground and withers up, or the seed that gets into the weeds, grows a little, but the pressure of the world and sin just chokes them off, and they finally give up on trying to follow the Lord's way. And because they are the seed that takes root and moves forward, some 10 percent, some 20 percent, some 40 percent whatever the forward moving percentage is, they want to stay with God, walk the pathway to eternal life.

So indeed God hears their prayers asking for forgiveness of sin, and He hears your prayer on their behalf when you know they are having a fight with some specific sin.

THEY HAVE NOT SINNED UNTO DEATH! They have not GIVEN UP, they have not stopped battling the downward pulls of the flesh, the evil of the world around them, and the power of the Devil. So mercy and forgiveness is still coming from God the Father, and the death penalty for sin does not hang over their heads. They are still under the grace of God.

And remember Jesus in heaven also works for us. He is our High Priest interceding for us, so we can be given mercy, forgiven, and remain under grace. We saw in the book of Hebrews all that wonderful truth.

Yes, as physical beings, with weaknesses, we do sin at times, but unless we "pack it all in" - "go back to the world" - "tell God to get lost" - our sin is NOT UNTO DEATH. We sinning Christians still have eternal life in us, because we have NOT packed our suitcase and walked out of God's house and life, so we have not sinned unto death.

Now there is a SIN UNTO DEATH! If you GIVE UP on God's way, pack it all in, decide to turn your back on God, decide to have nothing more to do with Him and His way of life, and you no longer care if you sin or how you sin, then yes, you are in deep troubled water, water that will drown you eventually, unless you pull yourself (with God's help) out of that dirty smothering water.

Your attitude has now changed, as a practicing way of life, you have chosen to turn from God's way of life, you now couldn't care less if you sin. With that attitude of heart, you have sinned the sin which is UNTO DEATH. Death reigns over you again, you have been willing to be a slave to sin. Paul wrote it this way: "Know you not, that to whom you yield yourself servants to obey, his servant you are to whom you obey; whether of sin UNTO death, or of obedience unto righteousness" (Romans 6:16).

The sin unto death is when you KNOW the WAY of the Lord, the WILL of God, the COMMANDMENTS of the Most High, and with a planned, cold calculated heart, not under stress, or weakness of the flesh, but a very clear mind to just turn away from God, THEN you have sinned unto death.

Certainly, no Christian should be praying that another Christian sins the sin unto death.

John gives another definition of sin, "all unrighteousness is sin." And the Bible interprets "righteousness" for us. I've given it to you before, but here it is again - Psalm 119:172. "All Thy commandments are righteousness."

But even with all that said - a pretty large area that can be classified as sin, John wants us to clearly know that there is a sin NOT unto death. And that, we have covered above (verse 16-17).

The AMPLIFIED BIBLE brings out the Greek tenses of verse 18.

"We know (absolutely) that anyone born (begotten it should be - for the truth about being 'born again' see the study under that name - Keith Hunt) of God does not (deliberately and knowingly) practice committing sin, but the One Who was begotten of God carefully watches over and protects him (Christ's divine presence within him preserves him against the evil), and the wicked one does not lay hold (get a grip) on him or touch (him)".

The children of God have set their minds to love God, to serve Him, to follow His commandments. Their practice and way of life is not the way of living without God's will being done in their lives. They do not practice as a way of life, sinning. The person begotten of God watches themselves in their daily actions, words, thoughts, emotions, deeds, to keep close to the Lord. In so doing they walk with Him and then with the presence of the Lord with and in them, the wicked one, Satan the Devil, cannot hold them in his power.

Speaking personally, I know Satan is very real, and his demon helpers, but I do not go around each day, worrying and fretting over them coming after me to do me physical or mental harm. I have walked with the Lord for so long now, I am at ease and peace of mind, I am calm and tranquil of mind. I know God and Christ are with me, in me through their Spirit, so fear of the wicked one is cast away, and the love of God in me, gives me peace.

There is a peaceful wonderment when you know you are of God, in God, when you know THEY (both the Father and the Son) are IN you. The world may lie in wickedness, sin, and deception, but the child of God is free from the world and from Satan.

We know that Jesus did live and did die for us, and the Holy Spirit gives us understanding of all things important to spiritual life. Through the Son we can know the Father, know that He is true, and that we are IN Him that is true. We are in His Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God, Jesus is part of the very Godhead, that is the only one true God, and the only one true way to eternal life (verses 19-20).

In a few verses John is putting the whole of the Gospels, (certainly his own Gospel) together. This is what Jesus taught over and over again.

God the Father sent Jesus to show us in a personal form, what He is like. If we know Jesus we know the Father. And it is THEIR desire, both of them, to LIVE in us through their Holy Spirit, to teach us, to give us understanding of spiritual matters, and finally to give us GLORY, change us, from human to divine, to give us birth into the very Family that is God.

If you have not done so, please study my study called "A Christian's Destiny" and see the wonderment that the Father wants to give to us.

John ends this his first epistle with the admonition that we will keep ourselves from idols. And anything that comes before serving God with all your heart, mind, body, and life, is an idol for you. So indeed may you keep yourself from idols (verse 21).

CHAPTER 33

THE 2ND EPISTLE OF JOHN

This introduction is taken from the NJKV Personal Study Bible; Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990, 1995.

Second John is, in part a concise application of the message of 1 John. According to 1 John we must believe that the Son of God became man, and we must love one another. Second John deals with these same themes in a much shorter way.

AUTHOR AND DATE

This book was probably written between A.D. 85 and 95 by the apostle John, the same person who wrote 1 John. John does not refer to himself as an apostle, but rather as "the elder" (verse 1). "Elder" was a term of respect used by both Jews and Christians for venerating religious teachers, and was perhaps used of John later in his life (see 1 Peter 5:1). Some scholars have speculated that the elder John who wrote this letter may have been a disciple of the apostle John.

BACKGROUND

Second John has the form and size of a normal personal letter of the first century. It was addressed to "the elect lady and her children." This may well have been a figurative way of referring to a local church and its members, probably in Asia Minor. The false teachers threatening this church held the same error as those subtle deceivers who deny that Jesus Christ truly became a human being. [The deception may have included that, but there was a deeper, even more clandestine deception they were teaching - Keith Hunt].....

OUTLINE OF 2 JOHN

- (1). Salutation (1-4)
- (2). Exhortation (5-11)
 - A. Continue in love (5,6)
 - B. Guard your faith (7-9)
 - C. Refuse error (10,11)
- (3). Conclusion (12,13)
 - A. Further plans (12)
 - B. Exchange of greetings (13)

The purpose of this writing by John is an earnest plea to continue in the LOVE of God and that includes loving one another. It is also to guide and exhort true Christians to reject those who were teaching false ideas, one being that Christ is not coming and living inside people through the Holy Spirit. It was a theology that taught we do not have to live as Christ lived, which was a way of rejecting some practices that would put you too close of an association with "Jews." By the end of the first century A.D. there was a movement OUT of the Church of God, into a "Christian" religion that was in many ways fundamentally different from the original Christians who were regarded by the Jews and the Roman power to be another "Jewish sect."

History records and shows the rise of a "Christian" religion centered in Rome from the beginning of the second century A.D. that was disregarding anything that could be called "Jewish" - like the 7th Day Sabbath, and the Passover. It was well under way in the first part of the second century to move towards observing the First Day of the week, and Easter instead of the Passover.

This letter may have been to a personal "lady" and her children, but it may have also been a way of addressing a church congregation and its members. It was possible that it was a letter that could have been read in any Christian congregation, with a message to any true Christian church.

Love is immediately the theme, as well as "the truth." Truth will never be extinguished, it will always survive. It will be with us forever, and shall be within us, through the Holy Spirit. This is exactly what Jesus taught in the Gospel of John, chapter 16.

John sends greeting, and tells them the grace, mercy, and peace comes from the Father and the Son of the Father. Again no mention of the Holy Spirit, if the Holy Spirit is a third individual personal being sitting in heaven with the Father and the Son. This would be highly indignant of John if such was the case, that the Holy Spirit is a personal separate being, as are the Father and the Son.

He rejoices that he knows they are walking "in the truth" as come from the Father. He says he is not writing any new commandments, but the old commandment, that we should love one another. Obviously at this time of the first century, near its completion, there was a problem with love among those who called themselves Christian.

In verse 6, with connection to verse 4 and "the Father" John plainly tells us that LOVE IS: THAT WE WALK AFTER HIS COMMANDMENTS.

It is the commandment that was from the BEGINNING. The TEN commandments of God have been from the very beginning of the creation of mankind. I have a study on my website called "The Ten Commandments before Moses."

Nothing could be more clear that at this time of the last decade or so of the first century, the true apostles of God were teaching Christians to obey the Ten Commandments, which still included the fourth one, as found in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5.

John says MANY, not the few, many deceivers are out there in the world, they will not confess or admit that Jesus Christ is continuing to come into the human heart and mind. The Greek for "is come" is in the PRESENT tense, and the present tense in Greek means: "The present tense indicates PROGRESSIVE action at the present time - 'he is loosing.'" (Essentials of New Testament Greek by Ray Summers, 1950). Jesus was doing exactly what He said He would do. He would return to the Father and the Holy Spirit would be sent to His followers, It would be that the Father and the Son, both of them, would live WITHIN the believer (John 14:15-24). Jesus would come into the flesh, come again via the Holy Spirit to live His life within His disciples. This is precisely what Paul said about himself and the faith of Christ in him (Galatians 2:20).

There can be NO ARGUING with living as Jesus lived in conduct, words, actions, and practices.

We are to "look to yourselves" - be careful, be observant, be willing to look at yourself in the mirror of Christ, in the mirror of the commandments of God, which are broken down for us by Christ Himself, as love towards God and love towards your fellow man. We are to hold on to all that, so we will then receive a full reward, when the time comes for rewards to be handed out to the children of God.

Christ is the center. If we abide in the teachings - doctrines of Christ we have both the Father and Son. All we need to do is read the Gospels, KNOW what Jesus was like, what He taught, how He thought, how He spoke, and FOLLOW AND IMITATE HIM! If we do that we have Christ and the Father with us, inside of us. If we DO NOT what Christ taught and how He lived, we simply do not have Him in us, neither the Father in us.

It is not hard to understand HOW to live as a Christian. Just read the Gospels, get to REALLY KNOW Christ, get the mind of Christ in you (Phil.2:5). There are books and books and more books constantly being published by "Christian religious" writers. There are those with PhDs in Christianity. There are preachers and teachers that have fame on TV and are looked to by tens of thousands as "knowledgeable theologians" - BUT unless they teach and follow the Christ of the Gospels, they have no credibility where it counts, with the Father. Many in John's time were already deceiving people, already departing from the Jesus of the Gospels.

So serious did John feel this deception away from Christ was, that he here taught that if ANY should come to you, who was not teaching the Jesus of the Gospels, and the teachings that Jesus taught, then do NOT allow them into your house, and do not even bid them God speed, "God be with you" type phrase as they depart from you. If you do bid them God speed you are really (according to John, who was inspired to say all this) a partaker of their evil deeds. "Evil deeds" - that is strong language, I didn't put it there, it's been there for nearly 2,000 years in your New Testament. John goes as far as saying such deceivers are anti-christ.

The main thoughts and teachings from these three epistles of John should be pretty clear to see by now. They are VERY STRONG in telling you WHAT the LOVE of God IS. And it is not some tingle up and down your spine. They are VERY STRONG in telling you about false teachers, who take you away from following Christ and the commandments of God.

John ends by telling us that he had many things to write, but not with paper and ink, he wanted to come unto them and talk face to face, and so their joy could be full. His final sentence: "The children of thy elect sister greet you. Amen" (verses 1-13).

John was to write more, much more, about spiritual truth, deception, and the last end time years of this age, in being inspired to write the book of REVELATION, which I am now not far away from expounding to you.

CHAPTER 34

THE 3RD EPISTLE OF JOHN

The following introduction is taken from the NKJV Personal Study Bible, Thomas Nelson publishers, 190,1995.

John addresses this epistle to an individual named Gaius...the Christian faith, called "the truth," is to be lived in love with all of God's people.

AUTHOR AND DATE

Third John was probably written by the author of 1 and 2 John sometime between A.D. 85 and 95. See introduction to 1 John: Author and Date.

BACKGROUND

Gaius probably attended a church in a city of Asia Minor....it is apparent that Diotrephes had gained control of the church, and in his arrogance had rejected the apostle John and his representatives.

PURPOSE AND CONTENT

This letter applies Christian principles to church life and administration. Gaius is commended for continuing to walk in Christian truth, showing generosity to local church members, and aiding travelling evangelists. Diotrephes is condemned for his prideful rejection of the apostle, domination of the local church, and refusal to give hospitality. Finally, Demetrius, a fellow Christian and perhaps the bearer of this letter, is recommended to the confidence of the church.

OUTLINE

- (1). Salutation (1-4)
 - A. Assurance of love and prayers (1,2)
 - B. Joy over a good testimony (3,4)
- (2). Encouraging God's workers (5-8)
 - A. Extending hospitality (5,6)
 - B. Helping the missionaries (7,8)
- (3). Reproving opponents of truth (9-11)
 - A. A rebellious leader (9)
 - B. Malicious words (10)
 - C. Evil acts (11)
- (4). Commending a good example (12)
- (5). Conclusion (13,14)

John starts with a HUGE positive in writing to Gaius. It concerns them both being "in the truth." How could it be otherwise for John. He had walked and talked with Jesus for about three and one half years. He certainly KNEW THE TRUTH. So did Gaius. Hence John's greeting him "in the truth" (verse 1).

Verse two has often been used by "health and wealth" preachers of Christianity, that with their formula (which means believing them and supporting their work with money) they will be guaranteed "wealth and health" and all prosperity in this physical lifetime.

The facts are that it just does not work that way for EVERYONE, at all times and in all places. Just a look at various accounts in the Bible, which show you this teaching is incorrect. Then to make it simple, just look at Hebrews chapter eleven. There are MANY factors that must take place, which includes God's will, to bring about physical wealth and health. Just because you accept Christ as personal Savior and start to follow the way of the Lord, does not automatically guarantee you will be wealthy and in super health for the rest of your physical life.

Certainly in the apostles Paul's life there were times when he was in need, and times when he abounded, but as he said, he had learned that whatever state he was in physically, to be CONTENT!

There are so many factors to consider, not the least, is the factor of God, and His plans for your life, and the work He may have in store for you within the Gospel work. There is the factor of you yourself, how you use what you have been given, how wise you are in the mammon of this world.

When you become a child of God, you do not become the Lord's little toy robot. The Father leaves you to still be a free moral thinking human person. He often leaves you to make mistakes and/or bad decisions, in various areas of your physical life, which can then affect your wealth and your health. If you do not obey the laws of health (correct diet, exercise, enough sleep etc.) you can hardly expect God to bless you with super health.

So this second verse is not some "catch all" or "quick fix" waving of the magic wand, as some false teachers would like you to believe (if you support them in physical ways). John was remembering Gaius, and prayed for him, that he would be in prosperity and health. John's personal desire was for it to be this way with Gaius. I think we should be able to relate to this with common and general understanding, as we may write to someone and start our letter with, "I hope this finds you in good prosperity and in health" or "You are my dear friend and my prayer for you are that you will prosper and be in good health." It is a GENERAL friendly statement of your personal desires and wishes for your friend. The rest of it all must be left up to God and the wisdom of the individual (in their daily life) you are writing to.

John tells Gaius he rejoiced greatly when people came from his congregation and testified of the truth that was in him, that he walked and lived in the truth of God. It was a tremendous joy, no greater a joy, for John, than to hear his spiritual children walked in the truth (verses 3,4).

And should not that be as we would want to hear. It is with GREAT PLEASURE that I sometimes hear from God's people, that they are studying their Bible along with my

website and all the studies on it, and WALK the straight and narrow road of salvation. It is with pleasure I sometimes get an email, telling me how pleased they were to find my website. I do have the daily stats from the people who host my website and at present (October 2007) there are about 500 people who use my website on a daily basis. All that said, the MAIN thing is that people around the world are walking in the footsteps of our Lord and Savior Christ Jesus, and sticking to the truth of His word. Being willing to live by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.

John praises Gaius for his charity to the brethren and to passing Christians who travel through his part of the world. Gaius was kind and charitable in physical ways to the travelling true Christian ministers, who did not take or expect physical needs to be met in their lives from the Gentiles per se. Not that some Gentiles no doubt did support the travelling evangelists, but they did not look for it or expect it. John encourages Gaius to continue in those good works among the brethren and those passing through where he lived (verses 5-8).

With what we have been given we all should be helping those in need, in whatever way we can. For some it is taking time to help and serve in physical ways within charitable organizations. For others it is physical goods, food, clothes, etc. to charitable works. And for others it is money they can give to those in need. For still others it is a mixture of all the above ways to serve others.

We need to be, in one way or another, GIVING BACK to others what the Lord has given to us. We should not forget that prayers for others is a very important part of giving back and serving in God's work. There are some who may have only "time" to give, time in prayer. Maybe they can pray for long periods of time for all kinds of people and situations and needs in the Church of God. Prayer like that is a wonderful blessing to be able to give in serving in the work of God.

Church Government!!

I'm giving extra emphasis to this heading here. This is one TREMENDOUS section of the epistles of John, that may be overlooked by many. It is a section FULL and DEEP with truth on "church government." Many may miss it, if they have not experienced churches that ABUSE. If you have never been in a congregation (single or organizations of more than one congregation) that is RUN and DOMINATED by an INDIVIDUAL as KING-PIN, or the "little Hitler" of the congregation, then you may miss what John is hear saying in the next verses.

It may SHOCK some of you, to even think that what John says in verses 9-11 is TAKING PLACE WITHIN A VERY TRUE CHURCH OF GOD! But it was indeed. The true church of God, the very Body of Christ, is not immune to the "take over" by INDIVIDUAL people! What may have started out as a good run local (or national or worldwide) work of God, CAN be turned into a ONE MAN DICTATORSHIP!

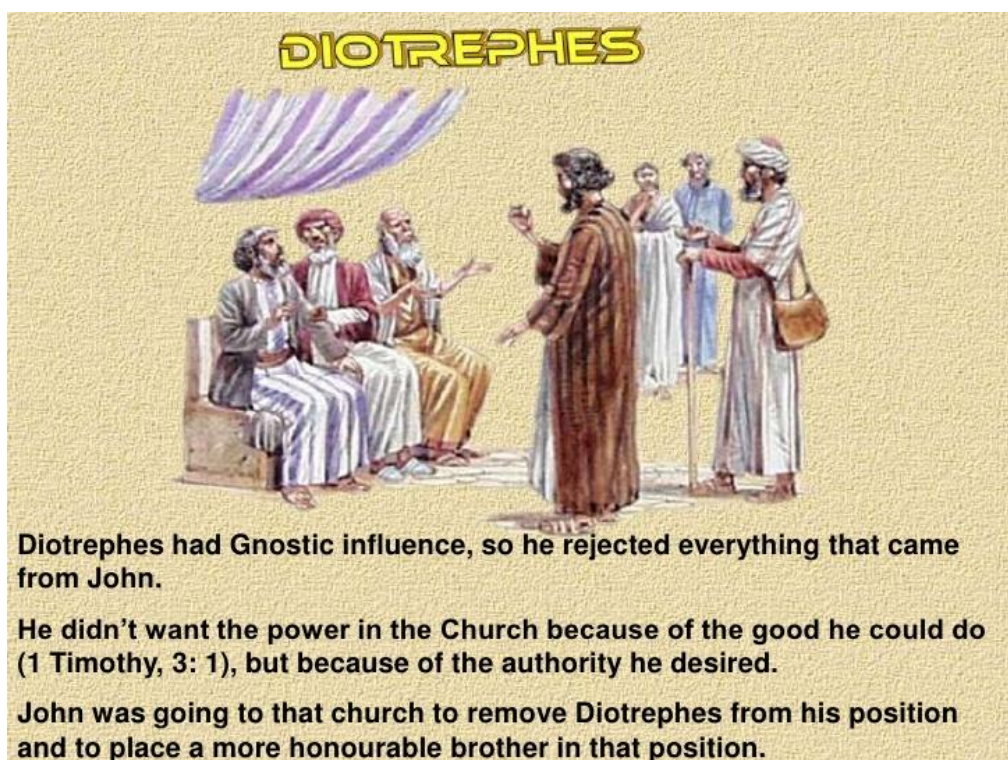
If you have forgotten Acts 20, you need to turn there right now and read it all again. Start in verse 17 and read to verse 38. Now MARK verses 29-30; never forget those verses. Paul was inspired to say that after he departed from them, some would come WITHIN, like grievous wolves would enter among the people of God, and would not spare the flock. Some of them would be from THEIR VERY OWN MINISTERS! They would begin to speak PERVERSE things, and do it all to draw away disciples who

would follow THEM. They would want to be the king-pin, the one that others would look to with "awe" - "Oh, he has a special connection with God" - "Ah, he's the very chosen one of God, to do the Lord's end-time work." Such are the thoughts and words of people who come under the spell of a DYNAMIC speaking leader, or one with domineering skills.

We have in recent "church" history people like Jim Jones leading his followers to death. We had David Koresh, and his followers in Waco, Texas, having his followers giving their wives to him, and many other crazy things, that ended up with many of them dying along with Koresh.

THEN, for you one time (or even current) members of the WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD, we had many local ministers who became little drill sergeants, who cast people out with the command of their voice. For any of you who have experienced this, and are still getting your mind sorted out over it all, read verses 9 and 10 VERY SLOWLY. What you may have gone through IS NOTHING NEW to the Body of Christ. Paul said it would be (Acts 20) and John, near the end of the first century, was writing about one SPECIFIC church that was GOING THROUGH the experience of a ONE MAN dictatorship!

Diotrephes, was a Jim Jones, a David Koresh. Like certain Worldwide Church of God ministers he wanted the PRE-eminence. He used malicious words, AGAINST, note it, think about it, against John the apostle of Christ! This just blows me away. John, who worked with, talked with, ate with, listened to, Jesus the Christ, for three and one half years, was BEING SPOKEN AGAINST, ignored, having malicious words cast at him, by this fellow called Diotrephes. This guy was not only not receiving the brethren, but was also FORBIDDING others to receive them. And I guess those others were LISTENING and OBEYING his dictates, too many of them sure were and, just as in any "cult" - those who objected to it WERE BEING CAST OUT OF THE CHURCH!



Does this all sound FAMILIAR to some of you? Yes it does, and so it is as wise King Solomon said, "There is nothing new under the sun."

If you have come even close to knowing or experiencing a Diotrephes, then take the time to study my studies on CHURCH GOVERNMENT. The truth of that subject CAN BE KNOWN, and once you know it, then you will be set free by the truth, indeed Jesus said, "The truth shall set you free."

And in passing, it is not wrong at times to NAME NAMES and get specific with sins and errors of false teachings and those who expound them. Here is a New Testament example of getting specific when it was needed to be specific.

After talking about this false doctrine and mannerism of this dictator leader, John says DO NOT THAT WHICH IS EVIL, but THAT WHICH IS GOOD. Doing the right is of God, doing what is not right means you have not seen God, or you are wandering from God. Again, it is just that simple folks. The right is of God, the wrong is not of God (verse 11).

We finish with a POSITIVE. Demetrius had a good report of all people (people that mattered) and a good report of being in the truth. John says he and others being record that this was correct. He knew that they knew his record was true. Obviously Demetrius was to play a part in the lives of this congregation, which we are not instructed in as to how.

John again says he had many things to write to them, but would not with pen and ink, he hoped to be visiting them very shortly and speak to them face to face (verses 12-14).

What wonderful three epistles from John the apostle. What wonderful truths they contain.

It all boils down to LOVING GOD, and what true love is. Love towards God, love towards fellow mankind. The TWO PARTS of the magnificent TEN COMMANDMENTS.

As John finished with, I will also:

"Peace be to thee, our friends salute thee, Greet the friends by name" (verse 14).

CHAPTER 35

THE EPISTLE OF JUDE

The following introduction is taken from the NKJV Personal Study Bible, published by Thomas Nelson, 1990, 1995.

This small epistle is a much-neglected gem in the Christian Scripture. The content of Jude is powerful, and the imperative to steadfast commitment is as compelling as any in the New Testament. The problem addressed in the letter is still with us, and we need to hear again these solutions.

AUTHOR

The Jude (Judas) named in v. 1 is most probably the half-brother of Jesus (see Matt.13:55). James, also mentioned in v.1, is another half-brother of Jesus, James the just, spiritual leader of the Jerusalem church (see Acts 15:13 and Introduction to James: Author and Date). There is no historical or literary evidence which compels us to reject the authenticity of this epistle.

DATE

Jude was written during the last half of the first century, as indicated by the content of the letter. False itinerant prophets had been accepted into the congregation (v.8), and there was evidently an openness to their teachings.... Also in Jude, as in other New Testament books, we find a first-century emphasis on the imminent return of the resurrected Lord in judgment (v.14, 15). This doctrine did not receive the same emphasis in most second-century Christian writings.

We may then with good reason assert that Jude is more a reflection of the apostolic faith of the late first century than it is of the middle or late second century. Although the epistle could have been written as early as A.D.50, it was probably composed and circulated a bit later.

Exactly when Jude is dated depends to some extent on the literary dependency of 2 Peter. Many Bible scholars note the marked similarity between Jude 4-19 and 2 Peter 2:1-3:3. Because the wording is so similar, most scholars believe that Peter borrowed from Jude, or Jude used Peter's words, or both used ideas from a common source no longer extant. [Or it was simply the Holy Spirit guiding both of them - Keith Hunt]. Because of this projected literary relationship between the two, Jude was probably written by the sixth or seventh decade of the first century, contemporary with the writing of 2 Peter.

CONTENT AND PURPOSE

Jude wrote this letter to a group of Christians who were dear to him and who were being led astray by false teachers. He writes to urge them to fight for the truth (v 3). These false teachers had even rejected the authority of Christ (v.4). God would judge them just as He judged those who were rebellious of old (vv.5-7, 14,15). Jude describes their pride, self-centeredness, and their sexual immorality. They were out to get what they could for themselves by any means (vv.8-13,16). Jude concludes with instructions on how to deal with these teachers (vv.17-23) and a hymn of praise to the God who is able to keep them from falling (vv.24,25).

OUTLINE

(1). Introduction (1,2)

A. Address and author (1)

B. Salutation (2)

- (2). Occasion and theme (3,4)
 - A. The appeal (3)
 - B. Background for the appeal (4)
- (3). The doom of the ungodly (5-16)
 - A. Three Old Testament examples (5-7)
 - B. Condemnation of false teachers (8-13)
 - C. The prophecy of Enoch (14-16)
- (4). Exhortation to the godly (17-23)
 - A. Warning from the apostles (17,18)
 - B. Spiritual division (19)
 - C. True spirituality (20,23)
- (5). Doxology (24,25)

As we read let us remember that it could well have been 60-80 A.D. when Jude wrote this letter.

He was a servant or bond slave to Jesus and the brother of James who many believe was one of the main leaders in Jerusalem (see Paul's remarks in Galatians 1:15-19; 2:6-10).

Jude addresses his letter to "them that are sanctified (set apart) by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called."

You will again notice there is no addressing or mention of the Holy Spirit being also a third individual as like the Father and Son. Enough said on that. The reader can study my studies on the Holy Spirit and the "Trinity" doctrine for the truth of the matter on that subject.

He desires mercy, peace, and love, for them, to be multiplied.

Remember what you read above? Many, if not most, scholars agree that Jude was probably written between 50 to 80 A.D.

LOOK AT VERSES 3-5! They are SHOCKING verses! Before 80 A.D. THE TRUTH, THE FAITH ONCE DELIVERED, was BEING CHANGED AND PERVERTED, TWISTED AND CORRUPTED!

As Jude was writing about the COMMON SALVATION, the easy to understand, simplicity that is in Christ, as Paul once called it. Jude had to STOP and REALIZE he could NOT write like that, because the FAITH ONCE DELIVERED had been CORRUPTED! He fully realized he had to write to his readers that they EARNESTLY CONTEND, STRIVE for, with MIGHT AND DETERMINATION they needed to get back or hold on to the FAITH ONCE DELIVERED TO THE SAINTS!

Certain men had CREPT IN, kind of un-noticed, not openly seen at first (remember how Paul wrote that Satan can come as an angel of light), but finally their true colors came through, all too clear to be seen. But their damage was powerful, it turned

many away from the true faith once delivered to them. These men - some of them, were from the very Eldership of the Church of God (read Acts 20 once more - get the picture set in your mind and never forget this truth). They were classified by Jude as "UNgodly men" and they TURNED upside down the "grace" of God - they turned it into a LICENSE to sin. "Oh, this commandment of God does not apply any more." Or "This law is changed in the New Testament of grace." Something along those lines would have been their reasoning and teaching. Their theology in a grace of lasciviousness was in fact DENYING both the Lord God, the Most Holy One, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Friends, brethren, I did not come and put this in your Bible last night while you were sleeping. It has been there from the first century, before the first century A.D. had finished! The true Gospel was being TWISTED AND CORRUPTED into a license to sin before the first century came to a close. I ask you, HOW MUCH MORE IS IT CORRUPTED TODAY? Do you really believe the tens of millions that call themselves "Christian" are all following the faith once delivered to the saints?

That is not the way human nature works. Do you really think it is only the FEW that are following a deceptive Christianity while the masses are in the true light? That is NOT what Jesus taught nor did He look down to the end-times and predict the masses would be in the light while the few would be deceived. It was THE OTHER WAY AROUND!

Jesus said that people coming in His name, even saying Jesus was the Christ, would be the many, and they would deceive the MANY, so much so, that IF it was possible even the very "elect" would be deceived. Yes, Jesus did say that, you will find it in Matthew 24.

Jude reminds his readers that God saved Israel out of Egypt, only to destroy them that did not have the faith, the belief, that was the right belief. You should get the connection here. You can know the faith once delivered, the true ways of the Lord, and be in a "saved" condition, BUT if you leave that true way, reject the true faith once delivered, then you can be in an "unsaved" condition, and be heading for final destruction.

God can do the right thing for you, call you, give you all that is good, just as He did for the angels that He created. But free agency is never taken away from you, as it is not taken away from angels. There was a time in the past, when some angels under the leadership of a great covering angel REBELLED against God, and decided to turn to SIN. They rose up towards heaven and tried to unseat the Almighty One. They left this earth that had been given to them to care for, and fought against God and the righteous angels.

There was a "star war" that is hard for the human mind to comprehend. Perhaps we are seeing the end result of that war in the condition of the moon of this earth and planets like Mars. Spirit Beings fought in a "spirit" war with power we cannot imagine, perhaps throwing around comets etc. like marbles. Satan was cast down to earth again, and with him came his hench-men. All this is fully explained in studies on my website.

God cast them back out of heaven, set limits on them to reserve them in types of chains, spiritual ones that God has, until their judgment of the great day (v. 3-6).⁴

⁴ **EDITOR'S NOTE:** Jude 6 says: "'And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness until the judgment of the great day." This verse brings to mind another controversy in the Church of God relating to Genesis 6:4 which says: "There were giants (or possibly tyrants as the Hebrew word 'nephilim' can also be translated as) in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bore children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown." Just who were these sons of God?

The Jewish interpretation is that these were a group of fallen angels who "left their own habitation" in the angelic realm, manifested themselves as men and had sexual relations with women who begat the giants or men of renown. The majority Church of God position is that these were human tyrants who took women and were not fallen angels.

Men of renown is the correct translation at the end of Genesis 6:4 and doesn't have to be giants. The nephilim (Hebrew for giant or tyrant) at the beginning of the Genesis 6:4 who were in the earth both before and after the Flood is more likely to be actual giants rather than tyrant because of the many references to the Rephaim and Anakaim (sons of Anak) after the flood who were literal physical giants beyond today's tallest men. Goliath was one of the last of these before they were wiped out (perhaps a judgment from God). "Sons of god" is a strange term to be used for unconverted men here if that is what is meant. The term when applied to men is almost exclusively used for spiritually begotten (converted) sons of God in the New Testament. The only exception to this is a directly created son of God – Adam. As angels are directly created by God they are also referred to as sons of God in Job 38:7.

Going against the Jewish view is the giants' emotional self-awareness (eg. Goliath had a human mind and wasn't like an animal) if they were the offspring of fallen angels who manifested as men. Humans have this emotional self-awareness through the "spirit in man" (1 Cor. 2:11) which comes from God and one would presume that God would not give the "spirit in man" to the offspring of such a union.

That said, in the New Testament, we have two curious passages that, on the surface of it, seem to refer to the event in Genesis 6:4. In 1 Peter 3:18-20 Peter speaks of Christ speaking to the fallen spirits in prison and he specifies WHEN this happened – at the time of Noah's flood. This brings us back to Jude 6 which is the other passage which says: "And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness until the judgment of the great day."

They left their first estate and they are in chains, unlike Satan who is free to roam around the earth along with other demons. If Satan is free to roam around this begs the question: "What did they do that was so bad they had to be locked up while Satan is free to roam around?" A tough question for those who support the orthodox position. This is another of those minor curiosities / ancient mysteries we'll just have wait until Christ's return for the answers to. Interesting, but definitely not something which should distract us from **FAR** more important things that God wants us focused on.

Sodom and Gomorrah and nearby cities, are an example to us. Those people went whoring after false ideas, false and corrupt ways to live, strange fleshly practices, living not according to God's standards and commandments. They were destroyed in "eternal fire." They were finally punished for unrighteousness. You will note it was "eternal fire" - yet that fire is not still blazing away. It was "eternal" in its end result. It destroyed the people and the cities. They are not there today. This is not a verse to prove the "immortal soul" theology. The immortal soul and destruction of the wicked in the fires of hell, are all covered in various studies on my website.

These false ministers are defiled with their "dreaming" teachings. They teach things that get "You must be dreaming" phrase thrown at them, by people like myself. They are, with their teachings actually ignoring God, ignoring the truth that is before them in the Bible. They will not be corrected. They will not stop leading people into erroneous Christianity and false theology. Hence in their work they are in effect speaking evil of the dignities of the Father, and the Son, and the holy righteous angels. They do not "shiver in their boots" - they have no "fear" of God before themselves. Yet Michael the archangel when he was contending with the Devil about the literal body of Moses (what was going on at the death of Moses we are not given), did not dare bring an railing accusation, but said to the Devil, "The Lord rebuke you."

Here was an EVIL one, but Michael had respect, for God had created that being. The point of truth is that these false ministers should be shaking in their boots to not have respect towards God, but they do not! Somehow they have twisted their mind to think the wrong theology does not matter. They are teaching, "It's okay, we'll all get to heaven, but on different roads."

Just stop and think about all the crazy and out and out sin ways to live that many "churches" teach. You have homosexuals getting married in churches, you have ordained "ministers" that are homosexuals or lesbians who then teach it is fine to be a practicing homosexual or lesbian in God's sight.

That is just ONE thing I mention. I will not apologize for coming back to the FOURTH commandment of the BIG TEN. Many "ministers" KNOW the truth on that one, but will NOT teach it! Then you have the WRONG yearly Festivals that popular Christianity teaches. Easter was replacing Passover in the first half of the second century. It's in the "church history" books.

Christ-mass was not observed in the "Christian" church until the 4th century. The immortal soul teaching came into the Roman church and hence into Protestantism.

The burning forever in hell fire was a powerful teaching to scare people "into" the "church of Christendom" - both the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches used it for the advantage of church growth, and on and on we could go, with false teachings that are for the most part STILL in the popular Christian churches. The ministers of that Christianity do not shake in their boots before God. If they do NOT REPENT they are heading for destruction. That is what Jude is saying in verses 7-9.

FALSE TEACHINGS THAT CAME INTO THE VISIBLE CHURCH AFTER THE TIME OF THE EARLY APOSTLES

Sunday worship	IN PLACE OF	God's 7th day sabbath
Easter	IN PLACE OF	Passover
God's law done away	IN PLACE OF	Obedience to God's laws
Christmas	IN PLACE OF	God's Holy Days
Going straight to heaven or hell after death	IN PLACE OF	Future Resurrections
God is a Trinity	IN PLACE OF	God is a family and He is reproducing Himself through mankind

Jude 3 - I had need to write to you to exhort you to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints.

Jude goes on to say that such teachers speak evil of things they know nothing about. It's like the prophets of old said, the days have come when evil is called good and good is called evil. These teachers only know what is natural, what they have grown up being taught at home, in their schools, or at their theological colleges. Yet, let me add, somewhere along the way in their theological studies they have met the truth on many subjects but they refuse to accept it, which makes the matter even that much more serious and so they corrupt themselves in an even greater way, and those who come in contact with them are also corrupted, as branded with a hot iron (verse 10).

Jude gets at the base foundation of it all in verse 11. The false teachers are looking after themselves, they like the fame of leading the mass (pun intended for Roman Catholic priests) population of people who are "into Christianity." They like the money, the salary, the adoration, the acceptance they get for being in the main stream of Christianity. So some of them are talented "writers" of books which have a much wider market in popular main-stream Christianity. And so it goes, with whatever makes you "popular" with the large audience of people.

It's frank and plain words that God inspired Jude to use about false teachers of false theology. I can but record them as the KJV gives it: "These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever" (verses 12-13).

The true Church of God, the very body of Christ, was getting cancer from within. The truths of God were being corrupted, right while those false teachers were feasting with the children of God. On the surface most of the false teachers and false prophets looked friendly and looked to be "nice guys" just like good ol' Santa Claus looks friendly and loving and so nice to people. Satan (who has deceived the whole world - Revelation 12:9) knows how to cover all angles, from the outward right in your face evil, to the smooth soft chocolate dipped ice-cream-cone. But the Almighty God knows the heart and inner most being of it all - dress it up how you like, you are reading the facts of it all.

The last phrase of verse 11 is interesting "wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever." Now, stars can represent "angels" (Rev.1:20). Satan and the demons were created "good angels," until wickedness was their down-fall. Is this last part of verse 11 telling us about the final fate and punishment of Satan and his gang of demons? Maybe it is.

Maybe when there is no more human flesh and blood, when the new heavens and new earth shall be, that Satan and the demons will be banished to outer darkness of the universe forever.

I can think of no more a terrible punishment for them than that fate. They would have nothing but themselves to deceive, and they are already in deep deception and evil.

They would have nothing to influence and possess, not even any pigs (remember how the demons Jesus was casting out of a person, wanted to at least have some pigs they could enter), indeed what a punishment that would be for them.⁵

⁵ **EDITOR'S NOTE:** This is a subject of some debate in the Church of God. The common majority position supported here by Keith gets its main support from this verse (Jude 13), Revelation 20:10 which says "And the devil...shall be tormented day and night forever and ever" and Luke 20:36 which says: "Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels".

In the book of Revelation we read about the smoke of the torment of those who accept the mark of the beast (Rev. 14:11) and that of the destruction of Babylon rising forever and ever (Rev. 19:3) even though smoke dissipates and vanishes after a time. This opens the door for a possible different interpretation being what is meant to be conveyed than the apparent straight forward reading of Revelation 20:10. Since Jesus became human and died (Rev. 1:18) is this a model for Satan's own fate? Luke 20:36 doesn't mean there aren't exceptions for those who disqualify themselves and "the blackness of darkness" of Jude 13 could be interpreted as the unconsciousness of death.

A straight forward reading of both Isaiah 14:14-16 and Ezekiel 28:15-16 suggests Satan will be destroyed rather than be tortured or live on forever though there is enough in the wording to suggest a different interpretation in line with the more common position.

Way back in the time of Enoch, the seventh from Adam (in a writing that we do not have preserved for us today), it was told that eventually God would come with 10 thousand of His saints (or "holy ones" - so it could mean angels, or it could mean saints, maybe it is both) and execute judgment upon the wicked or ungodly, and all the words they have spoken against Him who is perfect righteousness (verses 14-15).



Jude 14 - Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his saints

This is probably the picture of Jesus coming in power and glory, with holy angels, resurrecting the dead saints, who meet Him in the clouds of earth, and continue down to the Mount of Olives at Jerusalem, when the wicked, and specifically in the context, the wicked of the false Christian religion, will be punished with destruction. The WOMAN WHORE of MYSTERY BABYLON RELIGION in the book of Revelation, will meet her doom.

Once more God fires both barrels, concerning the false Christian teachers: "These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaking great swelling words, having men's persons in admiration because of advantage" (verse 16).

You may like to read this verse in a modern translation. It is a kind of "you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours." The "spiritual politicking" that goes on behind closed doors of "Christianity" would shock most people if it was all known openly. And the true body of Christ's believers are not immune to that swelling vanity of ego and "I'll pat your back if you'll pat mine" syndrome. All done so personal gain in this life can be satisfied and the "status quo" preserved.

So it already was in place in the Church of God, and the people that were calling themselves under the name of "Christian." As early as 30 to 50 years after the death of Christ on the cross, the true way of the Lord was being corrupted. Jude tells his readers that they should not be dumbfounded at this happening, for it was predicted by the apostles of the Lord Jesus. They, the apostles, had already said that in the last days, the last time (note again here that "last time" is thought of as the days Jude was writing this letter - it has to be even worse by the time another 2,000 years has gone by), people would come who as far as the truths of God was concerned, they were mockers of it, and they would walk after their own desires to satisfy their own interests for the physical life (verses 17-18).

Jude said those false teachers were even then, beginning to separate themselves from the true body of Christ. It was starting to take place. It took another century or so to really DIVIDE and CONQUER. Polycarp and later Polycrates (from Asia Minor - Polycarp stating he was personally taught the Passover observance of Jesus' death by the apostle John) in the second century tried to debate the question of the Passover/Easter with the Bishop of Rome, to no avail as for the truth, Easter was adopted by the church of Rome, and so began the slide into A BREAKAWAY FALSE CHRISTIAN RELIGION! (verse 19).

Jude was confident that they were building up their faith, the most holy faith as he put it, and praying in the Holy Spirit. He tells them to keep themselves in the LOVE of God, and we have seen in the letters of the apostle John, what LOVE IS. In so doing they are to then look for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life (verses 21-22).

The LOVE of God and the MERCY of God are indeed connected, intertwined, they go together. It is law AND grace, not law OR grace, as many false teachers will tell you. Those who try to tell you it is law OR grace, or that under the New Testament age it is GRACE not law, do NOT KNOW what they are talking about. Eternal salvation has ALWAYS been law AND grace. From the very beginning it has been law and grace and FAITH in the sacrifice of God, the death of His Son on the cross, to forgive sins. Those BEFORE Christ came in human flesh and blood, looked FORWARD to that crucial sacrifice, those AFTER He died on the stake look BACK to that atoning sacrifice.

It's ALWAYS been that ANYONE, past, present, future, are saved BY GRACE through FAITH. But the law of God, which IS the LOVE of God has never been abolished. It cannot possibly be abolished. The real truth of the matter, as how anyone is saved, is found in my study called "Saved by Grace" on my website.

Jude tells his readers a VERY IMPORTANT practice of life as Christian people deal with each other, and as Christian leaders teach and guide others in the truths and righteousness of God. Some people have to have an abundance of COMPASSION given to them, a great deal of patience extended to them. Their up-bringing, past

ways of living in this world, their emotional state, their twisted minds coming from backgrounds that are so horrific as having to live through, must be handled with care, patience, sympathy, and compassion.

People who as children, were abused by parents or relatives in one way or another, children born and growing up with alcoholic parents, children and adults who were or are, into drugs, now trying to clean up their lives. People who were sexually abused as youngsters, and all the other kinds of terrible backgrounds that people are coming from, NEED SPECIAL COMPASSION. We as mature Christians trying to lead and help those people, must make a difference at times in HOW we help and guide them into true Christianity.

Then on the other hand, there will be at times, people coming into Christianity, or already there for a number of years, who have no background as mentioned above. They come from steady and we might say "clean backgrounds" - they are emotionally stable, have a sharp mind, were well brought up, and well educated. And they are just doing things they should not, not because of great weakness of the flesh, but just because they want to, they get themselves into the wrong attitude for one reason or another.

So Jude instructs that sometimes some people like that have to be handled with a firm hand, as Jude put it "with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment spotted by the flesh." It's a delicate balancing act, to be the guide and teacher of other Christians. It is not always just black and white in dealing with people as you try to lead them into mature Christianity. Some you deal this way with, others you handle that way, and still others another way.

It really is true what the apostle James said in his letter, "Not many [of you] should become teachers [self-constituted censors and reprovers of others], my brethren, for you know that we [teachers] will be judged by a higher standard and with greater severity [than other people; thus we assume the greater accountability and the more condemnation] (James 3:1 Amplified Bible).

I leave you with the last words from Jude. "Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy."

Yes indeed, it is possible to fall away from the grace of God, you are not once saved always saved. You must walk the walk till the end, you must endure to the end as Jesus put it, then you will inherit eternal life. At the end of the road you will be presented before His glorious presence FAULTLESS. See my study called "The Truth about Judgment Day." That day will be EXCEEDINGLY JOYFUL!" To the only wise God our Savior, be GLORY and MAJESTY, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen

FROM THE EDITOR (Roger Waite): In volume 4 Keith Hunt will continue with the New Testament epistles and cover the epistles of the apostle Paul.

We hope that you have enjoyed and learned a great deal from volume 3 and hope that you will join us in reading volume 4 of this New Testament Bible Story.